













# A History of ENGLISH LITERATURE

*(In Questions & Answers)*

**Vol. III**

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## FOREWORD

History-writing in general has seldom been encouraged by critics. John Wolcot advised Sylvanus Urban ( E. Cave ), the founder of 'Gentleman's Magazine', in the following memorable words :

*Deal not in history, often have I said ;  
'Twill prove a most unprofitable trade.*

Whether Sri J.N. Mundra's 'A History of English Literature' (in Questions and Answers) will prove a profitable trade or not is yet too early to prophesy, but one thing is certain that Sri Mundra has done greater service to the students of English Literature than to himself by disregarding Wolcot's advice, and writing a kind of history, which is full but not exuberant, precise but not pedantic and short but not skeletal. The form of questions and answers has been used throughout the book in order to provide a conveniently arranged data for the consumption of those students who fail in the University examinations on the score of irrelevancy. Sri Mundra makes catechism easy and unobtrusive and saves himself from the besetting sins of 'Longer and Shorter Catechists.'

None but a charlatan will pretend that a history of the kind which Sri Mundra has written is thoroughly original. Sri Mundra acknowledges his indebtedness to all standard Histories of English Literature and to eminent Historians and Critics. The chief value of Sri Mundra's work lies not so much in the matter as in the manner. It never absents itself from felicity and perspicacity.

A seasoned teacher of English Literature in the postgraduate department of English studies at Bareilly College, Sri Mundra is not only gifted with a sense of proportion and balance but also with an unerring instinct for sifting the data at his disposal. He ministers to the advanced students of English Literature, like a skilled physician, neither an 'Overdose' nor an 'Underdose,' and yet allows him widely to taste the rich flavours of English Literature from the 14th century down to the present day.

I have had occasions of watching the literary progress of Sri Mundra at close quarters, both as my student and (now) my colleague in the Department of English, and I can confidently say that he must have 'scorned delights' and lived 'laborious days' in order to produce a historical account of English Literature in questions and answers, so accurate in detail, perspicuous in style and discriminating in its critical judgments. I hope Sri Mundra's book will get about, and contrary to the ominous prediction of Wolcot for such kinds of literary writings, it will prove to be most profitable at least to those for whom it is intended, if not to the pockets of the writer.

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# CONTENTS

## Victorian Literature.

No.		Page.
<i>Poetry and Drama.</i>		
1.	Social, Political, Economic and Religious Tendencies of the Victorian Age	1
2.	Literary Tendencies of the Victorian Age	7
3.	Prominent Early Victorian Poets	11
4.	Poetical and Dramatic Works of Alfred Tennyson	12
5.	Tennyson as the Representative Poet of His Age	18
6.	Tennyson as a Thinker	24
7.	Tennyson as an Artist	33
8.	Tennyson as a Lyric Poet	41
9.	Poetical and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning	43
10.	Browning as a Poet of Love	48
11.	Browning's Philosophy of Life	51
12.	Browning as a Writer of Dramatic Monologue	57
13.	Browning's Obscurity	61
14.	Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a Poetess	64
15.	Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold	66
16.	Some Important Poems of M. Arnold	68
17.	Main Characteristics of Arnold's Poetry	72
18.	Matthew Arnold's Nature Poetry	86
19.	Pessimistic Poets of the Victorian Age	
	(a) Arthur Clough	91
	(b) James Thomson	93
	(c) Edward Fitz-Gerald	94
20.	Pre-Raphaelite Poetry	95
21.	Poetical Works of Dante Gasbriel Rossetti	104
22.	D. G. Rossetti as a Poet of the Pre-Raphaelite School	105
23.	The Poetry of Christina Rossetti	109



	Page.
24. Poetical Works of William Morris	112
25. William Morris as a Pre-Raphaelite Poet	114
26. Poetical Works of A. C. Swinburne	117
27. Main Characteristics of A. C. Swinburne's Poetry	121
28. Contribution to Victorian Poetry by the following Poets :	
(a) Coventry Patmore	128
(b) Francis Thompson	130
(c) George Meredith	130
(d) Thomas Hardy	131
29. Writers of Light Verse and Parody in the Victorian Age	134
30. Main Trends and Features of the Victorian Poetry	135
<i>Prose.</i>	
31. Main Works of Thomas Carlyle	139
32. Thomas Carlyle as a Literary Artist	144
33. Thomas Carlyle as a Literary Critic and a Prophet of His Age	147
34. Thomas Carlyle as a Political Thinker and a Historian	149
35. Main Works of John Ruskin	150
36. John Ruskin as a Critic of Art and Literature	156
37. John Ruskin as a Literary Artist and His Prose Style	159
38. <u>John Ruskin as a Social Reformer and a Critic of the Society</u>	161
39. Thomas Babington Macaulay as an Essayist and a Historian	166
40. Cardinal Newman and the Oxford Movement	172
41. Matthew Arnold as a Critic and a Prose-Writer	175
42. Walter Horatio Pater as a Critic and Prose-Writer	188
43. Difference between Walter Pater and M. Arnold	195
44. The Aesthetic Movement of the Victorian Age :	
(a) John Addington Symonds (b) Oscar Wilde	197
45. Robert Louis Stevenson as an Essayist	200

	Page.
46. Main Works of :—	
(i) <b>Historians</b>	
(a) James Anthony Froude (b) Alexander William Kinglake	202
(c) John Richard Green. (d) Edward Augustus Freeman, (e) William Hickling Prescott	203
(ii) <b>Biographers</b>	
(a) Mrs. Gaskell, (b) Mrs. Oliphant, (c) John Forster, (d) Trevelyan etc.	204
(iii) <b>Scientists</b>	
(a) Charles Robert Darwin (b) Herbert Spencer, (c) Thomas Henry Huxley	205
(iv) <b>Philosophers</b>	
(a) John Stuart Mill, (b) Alexander Bain, (c) Henry Sidgwick, (d) James Martineau, (e) Edward Caird	206
<i>Novel.</i>	
47. Main Features of the Early Victorian Novel and Novelists	207
48. Benjamin Disraeli as a Novelist and His Works	209
49. Bulwer Lytton as a Novelist	212
50. Main Novels of Charles Dickens	214
51. Charles Dickens as a Novelist	223
52. Dickens's Art of Plot Construction	224
53. Dickens's Realism, Plastic Imagination and Morality	226
54. Dickens as a Social Reformer	228
55. Dickens as a Humorist	231
56. Dickens's Pathos	233
57. Relation between Dickens's Humour and Pathos	235
58. Dickens's Art of Characterisation	239
59. Dickens's Descriptive Power and Style	245
60. Dickens as a Representative Victorian Novelist	246
61. Features of Victorian Novel in Dickens's work	
62. Principal Novels of W. M. Thackeray	250
63. W. M. Thackeray as a Novelist	254
64. Followers of Dickens and Thackeray : (a) Charles Kingsley	262

	Page.
(b) Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell	264
(c) Charles Reade	266
(d) George Borrow	267
(e) R. D. Blackmore	268
(f) W. W. Collins	269
(g) Anthony Trollope	270
55. Charlotte Bronte	272
56. Emily Bronte	278
57. Anne Bronte	282
58. Contribution by the Bronte Sisters to the English Novel	283
59. Main Novels of George Eliot	285
70. George Eliot as a Novelist	291
71. Main Novels of George Meredith	296
72. George Meredith as a Novelist	301
73. A Comparison and Contrast between George Eliot and George Meredith	305
74. Main Novels of Thomas Hardy	306
75. Thomas Hardy as a Novelist	312

## 20th Century Literature

### *Novel*

76. Social, Political, Economic and Literary Tendencies of the 20th Century or the Age of Interrogation	330
77. Main Tendencies of the Modern English Novel	334
78. Henry James	344
79. Contribution to Realism in Modern Fiction by George Moore and George Gissing	348
80. James Matthew Barrie	350
81. Samuel Butler	352
82. Rudyard Kipling	355
83. Arnold Bennett	357
84. John Galsworthy	361
85. Main Works of H. G. Wells	366
86. H. G. Wells as a Novelist and a Thinker	370
87. Joseph Conrad	373
88. D. H. Lawrence	377
89. Contribution to the Modern Novel by :	380

	Page.
(a) J. B. Priestley, (b) Frank Swinnerton, (c) Hugh Walpole	
90. Somerset Maugham	381
Aldous Huxley	385
E. M. Forster	387
93. James Joyce	393
94. Women Novelists of the 20th Century :	
(a) Henry Handel Richardson, (b) Dorothy Richardson,	
(c) Miss Humphrey Ward, (d) Sarah Grand	396
(e) Rose Macaulay	397
(f) Mrs. Clifford (g) Katherine Mansfield	398
(h) Virginia Woolf	399
95. Development of the Novel from 1939 to 1966	403
(a) Graham Greene	404
(b) Joyce Cary, (c) Evelyn Waugh	405
(d) C. P. Snow	406
(e) George Orwell	407
(f) Elizabeth Bowen	408
(g) Ivy Compton Burnett	409
(h) Lawrence Durrell, (i) Angus Wilson	410
(j) V. S. Pritchett, (k) Anthony West, (l) Henry Green	411
(m) Christopher Isherwood, (n) Robert Graves,	
(o) Rex Warner	412
<i>Prose</i>	
96. The English Essay and Essayists during the 20th Century—	
(a) G. K. Chesterton	414
(b) Hilaire Belloc	416
(c) E. V. Lucas	417
(d) Robert Lynd	418
(e) A. G. Gardiner	420
(f) Max Beerbohm	423
(g) J. B. Priestley	424
(h) E. V. Knox	425
(i) A. A. Milne, (j) Alice Meynell, (k) Dean Inge	426
(l) Charles Morgan, (m) Rebecca West,	
(n) Ernest Hemingway, (o) E. E. Cummings	
(p) C. E. Montague	428

	Page.
(q) Edmund Blunden, (r) Maurice Baring, (s) Aldous Huxley	429
97. Twentieth Century Biography and Autobiography :	
(a) Lytton Strachey	430
(b) Philip Guedalla	431
(c) Sir Osbert Sitwell and Others	432
98. Literature of Travel :	
(a) T. E. Lawrence	433
(b) H. M. Tomilson	434
(c) Sacheverell Sitwell, (d) Hilaire Belloc	435
(e) Cunninghame Graham	436
99. Prominent Writers of Nature and Country Life :	
(a) William Henry Hudson	437
(b) Henry Williamson	440
100. Historical Prose :	
(a) Arthur Bryant, (b) G. M. Trevelyan (c) G. G. Coulton	440
(d) A. L. Rowse, (e) H. A. Fisher, (f) H. Butler Field, (g) Deins Brogan, (h) R. H. Tawney, (i) Barbara Hammod, (j) H. G. Wells (k) Winston Churchill, (l) Sir James Frazer, (m) A. J. Toynbee	441
101. Scientific and Philosophical Literature by :	
(a) A. N. Whitehead, (b) Sir James Jeans, (c) S. A. Eddington, (d) Julian Huxley	442
(e) J. B. S. Haldane, (f) Lancelot Hogben, (g) Bertrand Russel	443
102. Literary Critics :	
(a) Arthur Symons	445
(b) A. C. Bradley, (c) Sir Walter Raleigh	446
(d) W. P. Ker, (e) George Saintsbury	447
(f) G. K. Chesterton, (g) Sir A. Quiller Couch	
(h) Sir E. Gosse, (i) J. M. Murry	448
(j) Sacheverell Sitwell (k) Lascelles Abercrombie, (l) Oliver Elton, (m) Herbert Grierson, (n) R. W. Chambers, (o) E. K. Chambers, (p) G. B. Harrison, (q) John Palmer, (r) Wilson Knight, (s) H. B. Charlton, (t) Professor Dover Wilson, (u) Moulton	449

	Page.
(v) Tillyard, (w) Sir Maurice Bowra, (x) Basil Willey (y) Lord David Cecil, (z) C. K. Ogden etc.	450
103. Modern Short Story and its Writers	455
(a) Tolstoy (b) Maupassant (c) O'Henry (d) R. L. Stevenson (e) Rudyard Kipling (f) Oscar Wilde (g) H. G. Wells	456
(b) A. E. Coppard (i) Katherine Mansfield	457
(j) Galsworthy, (k) Sean O' Flaberty (l) Anderson (m) Earnest Hemingway (n) Lawrence (o) J. Conrad (p) Forster (q) H. E. Bates (r) Miss Elizabeth Bowen	458
(s) Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, B. Bhattacharya, K. A. Abbas & Ruskin Bond	460
<i>Drama.</i>	
104 Factors for the emergence of Drama during the 20th Century	461
105. Main Characteristics of the 20th Century Drama	462
106. Henry Arthur Jones and A. W. pinero as Pioneers of the New Drama	467.
107. Main Dramatic Works of John Galsworthy	469
108. John Galsworthy as a Dramatist	473
109. Galsworthy's Conception of Tragedy and Irony	484.
110. Galsworthy has no Heroes and Villains	487
111. Difference between Galsworthy's and Shaw's Charac- terisation	490.
112. Main Plays of Bernard Shaw	494
113. Bernard Shaw as a Dramatist	501
114. Granville Barker as a Dramatist and a Comparison with Galsworthy as Realists	511
115. John Masefield as a dramatist	514
116. Sir James Barrie	515
117. Sir William Gilbert	517
118. Revival of the Comedy of Manners and its Prominent Writers :	517
✓ (a) Bernard Shaw, (b) Oscar Wilde,	518
(c) Noel Coward (d) Somerset Maugham	519
(e) Sutro (f) James Bridie (g) Fredrick Lonsdale	520

	Page.
119. Irish Literary Theatre or The Abbey Theatre in Dublin and Irish Dramatists :	521
✓(a) W. B. Yeats	522
(b) Lady Gregory (c) J. M. Synge	523
(d) Lennox Robinson (e) T. C. Murray (f) Padric Column	524
(g) Edward Martyn (h) Lord Dunsany	525
(i) O' Casey	526
120. Provincial Repertory Theatre and the Manchester School Dramatists	527
(a) Granville Barker, (b) Stanley Houghton, (c) St. John Hankin	529
(d) St. John Ervine (e) Allan Monkhouse	530
121. The Historical Drama and its Chief Dramatists	531
(a) John Drinkwater	
(b) Clifford Bax (c) Ashley Duke	532
(d) Rudolf Besier, (e) Shan Leslie, (f) Miss John Temple, (g) Conal O Riordan; (h) Edward Thomson (i) Howard Peacey (j) G. D. Gribbe	
(j) Stutton Vane (k) Laurence Housman	533
122. The poetic Drama and Dramatists of the 20th Century :	534
(a) Stephen Phillips (b) Oscar Wilde	535
(c) Davidson (d) James Elroy Flecker	
(e) Dr. Gordon Bottomley,	536
(f) John Masefield, (g) L. Binyon (h) John Drinkwater	537
(i) <u>T. S. Eliot</u>	539
(j) Stephen Spender	543
(k) Sean O' Casey (l) <u>Christopher Fry</u> ✓	544
123. Expressionism in Modern Drama and the Dramatists of the 'Expressionistic School'	546
(a) Sean O' Casey	547
(b) C. K. Munro, (c) Reginald Berkeley	548
(d) H. F. Rubinstein, (e) J. B. Priestley	
(f) Elmer Rice	549
(g) Eugene O' Neill	550

	Page.
124. Development of Drama from 1939 to 1963	550
<i>Poetry.</i>	
✓125. <u>Main Tendencies in Modern English Poetry</u>	554
126. English Poetry of the Nineties and the Poets belonging to this Period :	559
<b>The Decadents :—</b>	<b>559</b>
(a) Ernest Dowson, (b) Lionel Johnson,	
(c) Arthur Symons (d) Stephen Phillips,	
(e) Oscar Wilde, (f) Addington Symonds	
(ii) <b>The Realists :</b>	
(a) Wilfred Blunt	560
(b) William Ernest Henley (c) Rudyard Kipling,	561
(iii) <b>The Pessimists :</b>	
(a) Thomas Hardy	564
(b) A. E. Housman	567
(iv) <b><u>Transitional Poets :</u></b>	
(a) Robert Bridges	569
(b) Gerald Manley Hopkins	573
✓(c) <u>William Butler Yeats</u>	574
(d) Gordon Bottomley	576
(e) William Watson (f) Francis Thompson	577
127. Georgian Poetry and Georgian Poets :	577
(a) John Masefield	579
(b) Walter De La Mare	582
(c) Edmund Blunden, (d) Lascelles Abercrombie	
(e) James Elroy Flecker	584
(f) Ralph Hodgson	585
(g) W. W. Gibson	586
(h) W. H. Davies	587
(i) Edward Thomas	589
(j) John Drinkwater, (k) Alfred Noyes	590
(l) Harold Monro (m) G. K. Chesterton	591
(n) Hilaire Belloc	593
128. Imagists as a Reaction to Georgians	593
129. <b>The Poetry of the Great War and the Soldier Poets</b>	<b>595</b>
(a) Kipling (b) John Freeman, (c) Lawrence Binyon	595
(d) Rupert Brooke	596



	Page.
(e) Siegfried Sassoon	597
(f) Robert Graves (g) Robert Nicholas	
(g) Wilfred Owen	598
(h) Julian Grenfell (i) Edmund Blunden	599
130. English Poetry between (1920—30) and the Prominent Poets of this Period :—	600
(a) T. S. Eliot	601
(b) Edith Sitwell	606
(c) Osbert Sitwell, (d) Sacheverell Sitwell	608
(e) Victorian Sackville West, (f) Richard Church	609
(g) Herbert Read (h) Humbert Wolfe	
(i) Roy Campbell	610
131. Poetic Trends between (1930—40) and Prominent Poets of this Period	611
(a) W. H. Auden	612
(b) Christopher Isherwood (n) Stephen Spender	614
(d) Cecil Day Lewis	615
(e) Louis Macneice	617
132. Poetic Trends between (1940—66) and the Prominent Poets of this Period	618
(a) Dylan Thomas	620
(b) Charlotte Mew Mary Webb, Sylvia Lynd, Rose Macaulay, Frances Cornford, H. D. and Dorothy Wellesely.	622

# VICTORIAN LITERATURE

(1832-1900)

**Q. 1 Give a brief account of the social, political, economic and religious tendencies of the Victorian Age.**

**Ans.** The Victorian age is one of the most remarkable periods in the history of England. It was an era of material affluence, political consciousness, democratic reforms, industrial and mechanical progress, scientific advancement, social unrest, educational expansion, empire building and religious uncertainty. There were a number of thinkers who were well satisfied with the progress made by the Victorians, while from a whole class of adverse critics could be heard a scathing criticism of the values held dear by the Victorians. While Macaulay trumpeted the progress that the Victorians had achieved, Ruskin and Carlyle, Lytton Strachey and Trollope raised frowns of disfavour against the soul-killing materialism of the age. Carlyle himself, a hostile critic of the age, admired L. H. Myer's reference to 'the deep-seated spiritual vulgarity that lies at the heart of our civilization.' Symonds detected in the Victorian period, whatever may be its buoyancy and promise, elements of 'world fatigue', which were quite alien to the Elizabethan age, with which the Victorian era is often compared. Whatever may be the defects of the Victorian way of life, it cannot be denied that it was in many ways a glorious epoch in the history of English literature, and the advancement made in the field of poetry, prose, and fiction was really commendable.

The Victorian age was essentially a period of peace and prosperity for England. The few colonial wars that broke out during this period exercised little adverse effect on the national life. The Crimean war, of course, caused a stir in England, but its effects were soon forgotten and the people regained the normal tenor of their lives without feeling the aftermath of war in their round of daily activities. In the earlier years of the age, the effect of the French Revolution was still felt, but by the middle of the century, it had almost completely dwindled and England felt safe from any revolutionary upsurge disturbing the placidity

and peaceful existence of its life. On the whole, "it was a comparatively peaceful reign when Englishmen, secure in their island base, could complete the transformation of all aspects of their industrial, commercial and social life without any risks of violent interruptions that gave quite a different quality to the history of continental nations." It was an era when the 'war drum throb'd no longer', and the people felt safe and secure in their island homes.

Peace brought material advancement and industrial progress in the country. The Industrial Revolution of the age transformed the agrarian economy of England to an industrial economy. Mills and factories were established at important centres, and the whole of England hummed with the rattle of looms and the boom of weaving machines.

Industrial advancement created social unrest and economic distress among the masses. The Industrial Revolution while creating the privileged class of capitalists and millowners, rolling in wealth and riches, also brought in its wake the semi-starved and ill-clad class of labourers and factory workers who were thoroughly dissatisfied with their miserable lot. National wealth was increased but it was not equitably distributed. A new class of landed aristocracy and millowners sprang up who looked with eyes of disdain and withering contempt on the lot of the ragged and miserable factory hands. Conditions of life held no charm for labourers and workers in the field; for they were required to dwell in slum areas with no amenities of life attending them at any stage of their miserable existence. There were scenes of horrid despair witnessed in the lives of the poor. With the whirligig of time a wave of social unrest swept over England, and the ulcers of this apparently opulent society were brought to the surface by writers like Dickens, Ruskin, and Carlyle. "The deplorable state of the debtor's Prison, the Fleet, and the Marshalsea; the dismal abysses of elementary education; the sorry type of nurses available in sickness; the oppression of little children; the prevalence of religious hypocrisy—these and many other dark corners in the life of England were illuminated by the searchlight of Dickens' genius."

The woeful and deplorable conditions of labourers, miners,

debtors, prisoners, soon caught the eyes of social reformers, and a stage was prepared for ameliorating the lot of the down-trodden and under dogs of an affluent society. The Victorian era, therefore, witnessed vigorous social reforms and a line of crusading humanitarian reformers who sought to do away with the festering sores and seething maladies of the Victorian age. The Victorian age is, therefore, an age of humanitarian considerations and social uplift for the masses.

In the course of the Victorian era there developed consciously amongst the increasingly large number of literary men and women and philanthropic social reformers a humanist attitude to life which was not a matter of creed and dogmas, but a recognition of the love and loyalty that the better-sensed people had for their unfortunate brethren. In the works of Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Carlyle and Ruskin, we notice the crusading zeal of the literary artists to bring about salutary reforms in the social and economic life of the country.

The growing importance of the masses and the large number of factory hands gave a spurt to Reform Bills, which heralded the birth of democratic consciousness among the Victorian people. The Victorian age witnessed a conflict between aristocracy and plutocracy, on the one hand, and democracy and socialism on the other side. The advance in the direction of democracy was well marked out, and in spite of the protestations of Tennyson and Carlyle, its sweeping tide could not be stemmed. "The long struggle of the Anglo-Saxons for personal liberty is definitely settled, and democracy becomes the established order of the day. The king and the peers are both stripped of their power and left as figure-heads of a past civilization. The last vestige of personal government and the divine right of rulers disappears; the House of Commons becomes the ruling power in England and a series of new reform bills rapidly extend the suffrage until the whole body of English people choose for themselves the men who shall represent them."

England witnessed expansion in the field of education. The passing of the Education Acts was a landmark in the history of education in the country. A large reading public was prepared to welcome the outpourings, of novelists, poets and social reformers.

The press also came into its own and became a potent force in awakening political consciousness among the people of this age.

There was a phenomenal growth in population during the Victorian age. The population of Great Britain at the time of the first census in 1801 was about ten and a half millions. By 1901 it had grown to thirty seven millions. More and more of territorial expansion was needed for the habitation of this growing population and England during this age launched on the course of empire building and establishing its hegemony in countries where the light of civilization had not yet advanced.

There was an unprecedented intellectual and scientific advancement during the Victorian age. It was a period of intellectual ferment, and scientific thinking. Science, once a sealed book save to an elect few, was democratised, and more and more scientific enthusiasts dedicated themselves to the popularisation of scientific works like Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The man of science was regarded no more an academic recluse, but as a social figure exercising a deep and profound influence on the social and educational life of the age.

In spite of the advance of science and scientific discoveries the general tenor of life was still governed by religious and moral considerations. The Victorians were moralists at heart, and religion was the sheet anchor of their lives. There was a marked conflict between religion and science, between moralists and scientists, each out doing the other in their orthodoxy, but the current of religious thought was not chilled. It was an age in which prime ministers raised echoes of a submerged religious vocabulary in their speeches and novels. The *Oxford Movement* represents the revival of the old Roman Catholic religion and the authority of the church at a time when science was challenging the religious thought of the age.

In domestic life the Victorians upheld the authority of parents over children. In the *Barrets of Wimpole Street* we have a vivid picture of parental authority and the subjugation of children to the will of the head of the family. Emphasis was laid on authority and reverence for the elders. Women were relegated to a lower place. They were expected to cultivate domestic virtues, rear up

children and look after the home and the hearth. Women were regarded inferior to men and Mrs. Ellis in *The Women of England* outlined the role of the female sex as being of service to the male members of the family. "The first thing of importance" she said, "was to be inferior to men, inferior in mental power in the same proportion that you are inferior in strength." Education was a closed book for most of the women, and the idea of establishing women's colleges was ridiculed by the national poet Tennyson in *The Princess*.

Victorians laid emphasis on order, decorum and decency. To talk of duty, honour, the obligation of being a gentleman, the responsibilities of matrimony, and the sacredness of religious belief was to be Victorian. "The Victorians," we are told, "were a poor, blind, complacent people"; yet they were torn by doubt, spiritually bewildered, lost in a troubled universe. They were crass materialists, wholly absorbed in the present, quite unconcerned "with abstract verities and eternal values"; but they were also excessively religious, lamentably idealistic, nostalgic for the past, and ready to forego present delights for a vision of a world beyond despite their slavish "conformity," their purblind respect for convention, they were, we learn, "rugged individualists," given to "doing as one likes", heedless of culture, careless of a great tradition; they were iconoclasts who worshipped the idols of authority. They were, besides, at once sentimental humanitarians and hard-boiled proponents of free enterprize. Politically, they were governed by narrow insular prejudice, but swayed by dark imperialistic designs. Intellectually and emotionally, they believed in progress, denied original sin, and affirmed the death of the Devil; yet by temperament they were patently Manichaeans to whom living was a desperate struggle between the force of good and the power of darkness. While they professed "manliness", they yielded to feminine standards; if they emancipated woman from age-old bondage, they also robbed her of a vital place in society. Though they were sexually inhibited and even failed to consider the existence of physical love, they begot incredibly large families and flaunted in their verse a morbidly over-developed erotic sensibility. Their art constitutes a shameless record of both hypocrisy and ingenuousness. And their literature remains too

purposeful, propagandistic, didactic, æsthetic, with too palpable, a design upon the reader; yet it is clearly so romantic, æsthetic, 'escapist', that it carries to posterity but a tale of little meaning."\* "Whatever we may say of Europe between Waterloo and Sedan", wrote John Morley "in our country at least it was an epoch of hearts lifted with hope, and brains active with sober and manly reason for the common good. Some ages are marked as sentimental, others stand conspicuous as rational. The Victorian age was happier than most in the flow of both these currents into a common stream of vigorous and effective talent. New truths were welcomed in free minds and free minds make brave men."

Our study of Victorian background will not be complete without adding a few lines about the *Victorian Compromise*. The Victorians sought a happy compromise when they were faced with radical problems. They were not willing to be dominated by one extreme viewpoint, and in a welter of confusing issues they struck out a pleasing compromise. Victorian Compromise was particularly perceptible in three branches of life. In the field of political life, there was a compromise between democracy and aristocracy. While accepting the claims of the rising masses to political equality, they defended the rights of aristocracy. While reposing their faith in progress in the political sphere, they were not ready for revolutionary upsurges disturbing the settled order of life. Progressive ideals were reconciled with conservative leanings for an established order of society. In the field of religion and science, a satisfying compromise was effected. The advances made by new science were accepted, but the claims of old religion were not ignored. Victorians took up a compromising position between faith of religion and doubt created by science:

*There remains more faith in honest doubt  
Believe me than in half the creeds.*

"They desired to be assured that all was for the best; they desired to discover some compromise which, while not outraging their intellect and their reason, would none the less soothe their conscience and restore their faith, if not completely, at least sufficiently to allow them to believe in some ultimate purpose and more important still, in the life after death. In voicing these doubts,

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\* Jerome Hamilton Buckley: *Victorianism*.

in phrasing the inevitable compromise Tennyson found, and endeavoured passionately to fulfil his appointed mission.”\*

In the field of sex, the Victorians had their compromise. The sex problem was the most blatant and persistent. In this field their object was to discover “some middle course between the unbridled licentiousness of previous ages and the complete negation of the functions and purposes of nature.” The Victorians permitted indulgence in sex but restricted its sphere to conjugal felicity and happy married life. They disfavoured physical passion and illegal gratification of sex impulse. They could not contemplate the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. In Tennyson’s *Lady of Shalott* we are introduced to ‘two young lovers’ walking together in the moonlight, but we are at once reassured by the statement that these two lovers were ‘lately wed.’ The Victorian ideal was to achieve ‘wedded bliss’ rather than satisfaction of the sex urge by illegal and unauthorised methods.

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**Q 2. What are the prominent literary tendencies of the Victorian Age ?**

**Ans.** The Victorian age was one of the most remarkable periods in the history of English Literature. It witnessed the flowering of poetry in the hands of a host of poets, great and small. It marked the growth of the English novel, and laid the foundation of English prose on a surer footing.

The note of individuality was the hall mark of Victorian literature. The literary figures of the Victorian age were endowed with marked originality in outlook, character and style. “In Macaulay there was much of the energy and enterprise of the self-made man. Tennyson loved to sing the praises of sturdy independence. In Dickens’ books there are, perhaps, more originals than in those of any other novelist in the world. The Brontë sisters pursued their lonely path in life with the pride and endurance learnt at the Haworth parsonage. Carlyle and Browning cultivated manner full of eccentricity; and even Thackeray, though more regular in style than his contemporaries, loved to follow a haphazard path in the conduct of his stories, indulging in unbounded

\* Harold Nicholson: Tennyson.



lience of comment and digression.”\*

The Victorian age was essentially the age of prose and novel. “Though the age produced many poets, and two who deserve to rank among the greatest” says Long, “nevertheless this is emphatically an age of prose and novel. The novel in this age fills a place which the drama held in the days of Elizabeth; and never before, in any age, or language, has the novel appeared in such numbers and in such perfection.”\*\*

Victorian literature in its varied aspects was marked by a deep moral note. “The second marked characteristic of the age is that literature, both in prose and poetry, seems to depart from the purely artistic standard of art’s sake and to be actuated by a definite moral purpose.”\*\*\* Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin were primarily interested in their message to their countrymen. They were teachers of England and were inspired by a conscious moral purpose to uplift and instruct their fellowmen. Behind the fun and sentiment of Dickens, the social miniatures of Thackeray, the psychological studies of George Eliot, lay hidden a definite moral purpose to sweep away error and to bring out vividly and in unmistakable terms the underlying truth of human life.

The literature of the Victorian age was co-related to the social and political life of the age. The Victorian literary artists, leaving aside a few votaries of art for art’s sake represented by the Pre-Raphaelite school of poets, were inspired by a social zeal to represent the problem of their own age. Perhaps for this reason the Victorian literature is the literature of realism rather than of romance, not the realism of Zola and Ibsen, “but a deeper realism which strives to tell the whole truth, showing moral and physical diseases as they are, but holding up health and hope as the moral conditions of humanity.” Literature became an instrument of social reform and social propaganda and was marked with purposeful, propagandistic and didactic aims.

A few literary artists of this age struck the note of revolt against the materialistic tendencies of the age, and sought to seek

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\* B. Groom: *A History of English Literature*.

\*\* W. J. Long: *English Literature*.

\*\*\* *Ibid.*

refuge in the overcharged atmosphere of the Middle Ages. An escapist note is also perceptible in Victorian literature, and this is particularly noticed in the works of Pre-Raphaelite poets. Rossetti delved in the folklore and diablerie of the Middle Ages. Morris busied himself in its legends and sagas. "There were some minor reversions to classicism, but taken largely, literature of the age continued to be romantic, in the novelty and variety of its form, in its search after undiscovered springs of truth and beauty, in its emotional and imaginative intensity."\*

The literature of the Victorian age in spite of its insistence on rationality, and an order born out of reason, could not completely cut off from the main springs of Romanticism. The spirit of Romanticism continued to influence the innermost consciousness of the age. It affected the works of Tennyson, Thackeray, Browning and Arnold. It permeated almost every thought just as it colours almost every mode of expression. All literary artists of the age were impregnated with it. Carlyle's thundering denunciations were charged with the same emotional fire and visionary colouring as that of Shelley and Byron. New vibrations were added to the main chord of Romanticism. Between the years 1875 to 1880 the romantic inspiration was again in the ascendent.

A note of pessimism, doubt and despair runs through Victorian literature and is noticed especially in the poetry of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough. Though a note of pessimism runs through the literature of the age, yet it cannot be dubbed as a literature of bleak pessimism and dark despair. A note of idealism and optimism is also struck by poets like Browning and prose writers like Ruskin. *Rabbi Ben Ezra* brings out the courageous optimism of the age. Stedman's *Victorian Anthology* is, on the whole, a most inspiring book of poetry. Great essayists like Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, and great novelists like Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot inspire us with their faith in humanity and uplift us by their buoyancy and large charity.

The literature of the age is considerably modified by the impact of science. "It is the scientific spirit, and all that the

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\* Moody-Lovett: A History of English Literature.

scientific spirit implied, its certain doubt, its care for minuteness and truth of observation, its growing interest in social processes and the conditions under which life is lived that is the central fact in Victorian literature.”\*

The questioning spirit in Clough, the pessimism of James Thomson, the melancholy of Matthew Arnold, the fatalism of Fitzgerald, are all the outcome of the sceptical tendencies evoked by scientific research. Tennyson's poetry is also considerably influenced by the advancement of science in the age and the undertones of scientific researches can be heard in *In Memoriam*

“In fiction, the scientific spirit is no less discernible: the problems of heredity and environment preoccupy the attention of the novelist. The social problem of the earlier Victorians, of Charlotte Bronte, Dickens, Kingsley and Reade give place to points in biology, psychology, pathology. The influence of Herbert Spencer and of Comte meets us in the pages of George Eliot; while the analytical methods of science are even more subtly followed in the fiction of George Eliot, the early writings of Mrs. Humphry Ward, and the intimate Wessex studies of Thomas Hardy.”\*\*

A note of patriotism runs through Victorian literature. Tennyson, Dickens and Disraeli are inspired by a national pride and a sense of greatness in their country's superiority over other nations. Tennyson strikes the patriotic note in the following lines:

*It is the land that freemen till  
That sober-suited freedom chose  
A land of settled government,  
A land of just and old renown,  
Where freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent.*

In one direction the literature of the Victorian age achieved a salient and momentous advance over the literature of the Romantic Revival. The poets of the Romantic Revival were interested in nature, in the past, and in a lesser degree in art, but they were not intensively interested in men and women. To

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\* Mair: Modern English Literature.

\*\* Compton-Rickett: A History of English Literature.

Wordsworth the dalesmen of the lakes were a part of the scenery they moved in. He treated human beings as natural objects and divested them of the complexities and passions of life as it is lived. The Victorian poets and novelists laid emphasis on men and women and imparted to them the same warmth and glow which the Romantic poets had given to nature. "The Victorian Age extended to the complexities of human life the imaginative sensibility which its predecessor had brought to bear on nature and history. The Victorian poets and novelists added humanity to nature and art as the subject matter of literature."\*

## THE VICTORIAN POETS

**Q. 3. Give a brief account of the prominent early Victorian poets before Tennyson.**

**Ans.** The prominent early Victorian poets before Tennyson were Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-49) and John Clare (1793-1864). Beddoes was a dramatist as well as a writer of short lyrics. He had a love for the morbid aspects of human life and his imagery was derived from the Jacobean dramatists. He tried to give the air of idealism to his poetry, but failed in the attempt. He had none of Shelley's buoyant idealism. For Beddoes, poetry had above all to be *haunting*, and he made an effort to achieve this quality in his poetry. He, however, failed in his attempt.

A simpler and purer inspiration is to be found in the poetry of John Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant poet, who was considered mad by his contemporaries. He was essentially a poet of the countryside and presented rural scenes in a remarkable manner. "The quiet intensity of his observation in his descriptions of rural scenes, and the skill with which he organizes detail, combine to achieve a poetic utterance of remarkable power and control." His nature poetry was a little different from that of William Wordsworth. Whereas Wordsworth was interested in contemplation and mysticism, Clare imparted no mystic touch to the sights and scenes of nature. He had genuine love for the sights and scenes of nature and he presented them with a calm lucidity that distils its downy kind of meaning. He could move

the reader by deploying simple objects and incidents in a remarkably eloquent manner. His diction had touches of eighteenth and nineteenth century poets. His poetry is Romantic in a sense, but it is classical as well in its control and poise (*Signs of Writer*) as can be seen from the following lines of the poem.

*The cat runs races with her tail: The dog  
Leaps o'er the orchard hedge and Knarls the grass  
The swine run round and grunt and play with straw  
Snatching out hasty mouthfuls from the stack.*

**Q. 4. Critically examine Alfred Tennyson's (1809-92) Poetical and Dramatic works.**

OR

**'Tennyson owed much of his contemporary fame to the variety of his work' (Groom) Discuss.**

**Ans.** Alfred Tennyson was undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of the Victorian age. He dominated the Victorian scene for a number of years in his life and was honoured with the high office of the poet laureate. Tennyson began his poetic career at quite an early age, and his early verses bear the stamp of Milton, Keats and even Virgil in a marked degree, yet he also carved one an independent line of his own. During the long span of his career as a poet he essayed every kind of poetry—the song, the idyll, the dramatic monologue, the dialect poem, the descriptive or pageant poem, the ballad, the war-ode, the threnody, the epic narrative and the drama. The extraordinary diversity of his work is itself typical of the strongly marked eclecticism of his age. He wrote on classical, romantic and modern subjects; on English history and Celtic legend; on the deepest problems of philosophy and religion, and the range of his method and style is scarcely less remarkable than that of his matter. In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets. The dreaminess of Spenser, the majesty of Milton, the natural simplicity of Wordsworth, the fantasy of Blake and Coleridge, the melody of Keats and Shelley, the narrative vigour of Scott and Byron, are evident on the successive pages of Tennyson's

poetry. The only thing lacking is the dramatic power of the Elizabethans.

The earliest collection of Tennyson's poems was published in 1827, when he was seventeen years of age, in *Poems by Two Brothers*. The poems of this period are immature, but in some of them there is the same excellence of metrical skill and descriptive power which Tennyson later on developed in poems like *Lotos Eaters*, *The Lady of Shalott* and *O Enone*. In 1830 was published the second volume of poems--*Poems Chiefly Lyrical*. The poet makes some advance in poetical skill and in pieces like *Isabel* and *Madeline* we have faint glimpses of the pictorial effect and the sumptuous imagery of his maturer work. His volume of poems published in 1833 shows a steady advance in poetic form, and some of the poems of this volume, e. g. *The Lady of Shalott*, *O Enone*, *The Lotos Eaters*, and *The palace of Art* are really master pieces of poetic art and metrical skill. These poems can take their stand with the greatest of English Poems. "The chief defect of this early work" says Compton Rickett, "is a thinness of inspiration. There is too much sugar, and too little flour in these literary confections."

In 1842 Tennyson produced two volumes of poetry containing some of the finest jewels of his poetic art such as *Ulysses*, and *Locksley Hall*. These two volumes placed Tennyson on that summit from which he was never dislodged in his life time. The poems of this volume bring him out as a thinker and register his progress as a metrical artist.

In 1847 Tennyson produced *The Princess a Medley*. It is the first long and elaborate poem on the subject of women's education, and their claim to social and political equality with man. Tennyson ridicules the very conception of woman's equality with man and his aspiration for higher education. He scoffs at the 'new woman' ideal and treats the whole subject in a jesting manner hovering between jest and earnest. The tone of the poem is serio-comic. It is diffusive in character and has no cogency in the treatment of the subject. It has no close-knit plan and is, in fact, a medley. To make it appealing to the readers Tennyson added a few lyrics of haunting melody to the second edition of the poem in 1850. The lyrics of the poems such as *Tears*, *Idle Tears*,

*Splendour Falls on Castle Walls* are exquisitely beautiful and are the special attraction of *The Princess*. "In these lyrics Tennyson expressed his favourite elegiac theme in a variety of metres and of contexts. The quietly singing lullaby, "Sweet and Low," the familiar modulation of heroic into melancholy in "The splendour falls on Castle Walls", the use of nature imagery to create a mood of loss and nostalgia in the unrhymed stanzas of "Tears, Idle Tears", and the dissolving of passion in a glimmering world of stars, sleeping flowers, and lake water that is suggested in "Now sleeps the crimson petal"—these are some of the successful experiments."\*

Three years later in 1850 Tennyson brought out the famous *Elegy In Memoriam*, written to mourn the death of Arthur Hallam, Tennyson's College friend, who had died at Vienna in 1833. It consists of one hundred and thirty one lyrics, "short swallow flights of song", composed at intervals stretching over a long period. It is the result of deep brooding over the problems of life extending over a period of seventeen years. The note of grief is deep and poignant in the early part of the elegy, but gradually the personal pain merges into anxious speculation and the poet is lost in solving the mystery of death and the ultimate destiny of man in the universe. The poet marches triumphantly from the state of despair, to a state of hope and optimism. Through states of doubt and despair, and anguished question, the poem mounts in a region of firm though saddened faith, and ends in a full hymnal music breathing hope and fortitude of heart.

There is no coherence and logical unity in the poem, and at certain places it becomes dull and monotonous. These defects can be glossed over considering the wealth of literary allusions, philosophical reflections on the problems of human life and the final note of triumph in the immortality of the soul. The monotony of the poem is also broken by the lyrical intensity of the stanzas, and their poetic appeal. "*In Memoriam* lives as poetry (as we might expect) by its lyrics which distil personal mood. Many of these can be taken out of their context and read as individual poems. Nevertheless, though these are the finest single poems in

the work *In Memoriam* when we read as a whole does impress and even more by its cumulative revelation of such a large tract of a man's emotional life; it has an integrity as autobiography and exceeds its integrity as poetry."\*

With the publication of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson's status as the poet of the age was assured. He was appointed Poet Laureate in the year of its publication, though he was not raised to the exalted rank of Lord Tennyson until 1883. In 1855 was published *Maud and other Poems*. "*Maud* is a monodrama, a rapid and feverish record, in a series of lyrics, of a love affair blasted by a tragic accident. It is true that at the end the crushed hero rouses himself to proclaim his patriotic determination to fight in the Cremean war which he sees as a salutary stirring up of a slothful materialist nation, but this jingoistic Coda has nothing to do with the monodrama as a whole. The speed and hothouse passion of the lyrics in *Maud* are impressive in spite of the almost morbid crowding of imagery." The lyrics in *Maud* are marked with a frenzy, and are coloured by heat and fever. The rhythms swing and crash, and the natural images bring out the heavily scented atmosphere which surrounds the hero and his love.

In 1859, 1869, 1889 Tennyson brought out a series of *Idylls of the King* which centre round the personality of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. The subject had earlier attracted the attention of Spenser and Milton; but they did not celebrate the achievements of King Arthur in verse. It was left to Tennyson to make use of the rich material for poetic composition. His immediate source of inspiration was Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Tennyson began to use these legends in his *Morte d'Arthur*. (1843). The epic idea probably came to his mind at a later stage, and when the twelve idylls were completed, the poet sought to give them an epic unity by combining them in a compact form. But it would not be proper to call the Idylls as an epic. They lack unity. They are twelve separate stories in blank verse grouped round the central figure of King Arthur. The absurdity of calling these idylls as epic would be clear if we consider their order of composition; they began at the end, reached the beginning in the middle and the middle at the close.



Tennyson used Malory's *Morte'd Arthur* as his source but, he stripped the tales of Malory of their 'bold bawdry' to please the people of his times. He covered them with an allegorical and symbolic meaning, and decked them with his delicate and detailed ornamentation. The allegory in these *Idylls of the King* may not be clearly marked out, but an undercurrent of allegorical meaning can certainly be detected in the personalities of the Idylls. King Arthur stands for the ideal of perfection, and Sir Bedivere for worldly wisdom. The three Queens are the three Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

It is one of the special characteristics of Tennyson's Idylls that though the subject treated by him is medieval, yet the manner in which it has been treated is modern. The Arthurian legends expressed in the idiom of the nineteenth century were adapted to the sentiment of the Victorian age. King Arthur is a gentleman of the nineteenth century. His grave chiding of Guinevere at the discovery of her sin is like a gentleman of the Victorian era rather than a man belonging to the age of chivalry. In short, as Hugh Walker suggests, "Tennyson, made it the great end of his art to express the modern spirit in the Idylls of the king, and the delineation of other times only as a means to that end." "The Idylls, therefore, spoke more eloquently to Victorian than to modern readers, many of whom prefer the robust and barbarous medieval originals to Tennyson's decorous moralistic visions of them. The poet's technical resourcefulness, his rich patterns of sounds and images, no longer veils the lack of passion and the presence of priggishness in these once famous tales."

Entirely different in spirit is another collection of poems called *English Idylls*, which Tennyson began in 1842. In these English Idylls he intended to portray ideals of widely different types of English life. Of these varied poems, the most significant and worthy of study are *Dora*, *Ulysses*, *Locksley Hall* and *Enoch Arden*. His poem *Dora* is an experiment in Wordsworthian blank narrative, which is mildly skilful but lacks the Wordsworthian tone of intimate exploration of meaning. *Ulysses* is a poem of inspiration and exhorts young and old alike to be active and vigorous in life without letting the thought of death cramping their enthusiasm. *Locksley Hall* is a study of

contemporary social and political life and is marked with a note of optimism and progress. It takes the form of a monologue in which the speaker, revisiting Locksley Hall, the home of his youth, recalls his love for his beloved Anny, who out of deference to her parents had rejected his love and married a man of the world rolling in luxury and wealth. This leads him to conjure up again his youthful vision of the progress of the world in which he finally expresses his confidence.

*Enoch Arden* (1864) is a popular work and poetises the life of the lowly people that make up the bulk of English life. Here the poet leaves the medieval Knights and Lords and deals with the story of Enoch who had married Arden. Enoch was reported to be drowned. He returned safe and found his wife happily married to another man. He regretfully returned without revealing his identity to his wife or her lover. The poem is rich in descriptions of nature and flights of poetic imagination. This long narrative poem, "tries to wring heroic significance out of a domestic situation treated with a moral feeling so "Victorian" (in the popular sense of the word) that all real life and complexity are lacking."\*

Tennyson's later volumes, like the *Bullads* (1880) and *Demeter* (1889) should not be overlooked by the reader, since in them are found some of his best poems. *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* and the *Death of OEnone* are some of the finest poems echoing the sumptuous imaginings of the years preceding 1842.

The study of Tennyson's poetry exhibits the great variety of his verse. "Tennyson owed much of his cotemporary fame to the variety of his work. His verse was an instrument which could express every mood, from the airiness of a cradle song to the sonorous sorrow of a funeral ode. He could write for the many in the sentimental strains of the *May Queen*, and for the few in the noble verse of *Ulysses* and *Tithonus*. He could express a national emotion with spirit and fire as in the *Charge of the Light Brigade*; he could delight men of science by his minute observation, as in the lines on the dragon fly in the *Two Voices*, and he could win the approval of philosophers by the profound experience of his elegiac and reflective verse. With this wide range he had also a

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\* David Daiches : *A Critical History of English Literature* (volume II.)

perfection of technique which made his English not only wonderfully expressive but free from every offence of harshness and monotony."

Tennyson's dramatic works are not of great significance. He wrote three historical plays—*Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876) and *Becket* (1884). In these plays he sought to dramatise the national history of England. They are not successful. "None, however, rank high as real dramatic efforts, though they show much care and skill." *The Falcon* (1879) is a comedy based on a story from Boccaccio. *The Cup* (1881) owes its inspiration to Plutarch, and *The Foresters* is a dramatisation of the old Robin Hood theme.

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**Q, 5.** "It will be right for the future historians to treat Tennyson as a representative of the Victorian period and to draw inferences from his work as to the general, intellectual and political tendencies of the nineteenth century" (Lytton). Discuss.

OR

"As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, Tennyson is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era." (W. J. Long). Discuss.

**Ans.** Tennyson stands in the same relation to his times as Chaucer does to the fourteenth century and Alexander Pope to the early eighteenth century. He is truly "the glass of fashion and the mould of form" of the Victorian period as Spenser was of the Elizabethan age. He is the typical Victorian poet voicing in his poetry the hopes and aspirations, the doubts and scepticism, the refined culture and the religious liberalism of the age. Like a detached but intent spectator he closely watched the ebb and flow of events happening in his country. He believed that it was the function of a poet to penetrate and interpret the spirit of his own age for the future generations, and true to his poetic creed, he presented flawlessly the Victorian age in its varied aspects in his poetry. "For nearly half a century" says W. J. Long, "Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a voice, the voice of a

whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, griefs and their triumphs. As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era." To quote Stopford A. Brook, "For more than sixty years he lived close to the present life of England, as far as he was capable of comprehending and sympathising with its movements; and he interwove what he felt concerning into his poetry. That Tennyson's poetry was an epitome of his times, that it exhibited the society, the art, the philosophy, the religion of his day, was proved by the welcome which all classes gave it."

Tennyson faithfully reflected the various aspects of Victorian life in his poetry. "The change which Tennyson's thought underwent in regard to social and political questions itself reveals his curious sensitiveness to the tendencies of his time; for the sanguine temper of his early manhood, the doubt, the misgivings, and reactionary utterances of his middle age, and the chastened hopefulness of his last years, are alike reflections of successive moods which were widely characteristic of his generation."\* It will be our endeavour now to examine how faithfully the poet is the organ voice of his age.

The Victorian era was essentially an age of peace and settled government. The old fire of revolutionary enthusiasm had been quenched and the people of the age longed for a life of settled order, stability, and peace. "They did not want excitement. They wished to be soothed and assured. They had enough of tremendous thoughts in familiar shape. They now wanted familiar thoughts in tremendous shape." The Victorians had a love for law, order and discipline. Tumult and storm and the revolutionary feelings upsetting established conventions were frowned by the Victorians. Tennyson reflects this craving of the age for the authority of law, and settled order. The dominant element in Tennyson's thought is his sense of law. The thing which most pleases and impresses him is the spectacle of order in the universe. The highest praise showered by Tennyson on his country is that she is "a land of settled government where freedom is ever broadening down from precedent to precedent."

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\* W. H. Hudson : An Outline History of English Literature.

The poet finds the working of law even in the sorrows and losses of humanity. 'Nothing is that errs from law.' This insistence on law and order constrains the poet to conform to certain established conventions of society rather than accept individualism and the unbridled freedom to act according to one's whims and fancies. Tennyson believed in slow progress and shunned revolution upsetting the order of society. He was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress; he held tenaciously to the great heritage of English tradition, and while he firmly believed in the divine scheme of things—

*The old order changeth, yielding place to new  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,*

he was quite as firmly opposed to "raw haste" and rash experiments and everything that savoured of revolution.

Politically the age was striking a compromise between the growing tide of democracy and political freedom to the masses and the continuation of the old order of aristocracy. Tennyson presents this compromising spirit of the age in his poetry. While conceding the claims of coming democracy he upholds the old aristocracy. Recluse and aristocratic as he was, he was profoundly interested in common people and common things, and it is not the least significant feature of his work in the mass that along with *The princess*, *Maud*, *The Idylls of the King*, it contains such things as *The May Queen*, *Enoch Arden* and *Dora*.

Patriotism and love for the country were the significant features of the age. Victorians took pride in their nation and national glories. In Tennyson's poetry the sense of national pride and glory is well sounded. He represents English life and manners with utmost sincerity. *The Northern Farmer* is the true picture of Lincolnshire peasants and *The Northern Cobbler* and *Village Wife* are all national portraits depicting the rustic life of England. In the *English Idylls*, Tennyson reflects the ideals of widely different types of English life. His praise for his own country is the expression of a Victorian patriot who considered his country superior to other countries of the world. Speaking of England, Tennyson says—

*It is the land that free men till  
That sober-suited freedom choose,  
The land where girt with friends and foes,  
A man may speak the thing he will,  
A land of settled government,  
A land of just and old renown.*

Tennyson is eminently a Victorain in his concept of love and his high regard for domestic virtues. In his attitude towards women he is a true Victorian. The Victorians did not approve of women's struggling for rights of franchise and equality with man. Women were created for looking after the household. This faith of the Victorians in the subordinate position of women is expressed by Tennyson in *The Princess* (1847) wherein he suggests that woman's role is to be a good housewife and enjoy the blessed good life of the home. Woman's place was the hearth. Nature had ordained :

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth,  
Man for the sword and for the needle she,  
Man to command and woman to obey  
All else confusion.*

Coming to the subject of Love and Sex the Victorians sought a compromise between unbridled licentiousness of previous ages and the complete negation of the functions and purposes of nature. The Victorians condemned illegal gratification of the sex urge. Tennyson reflects this spirit of the age by pointing out again and again in his love poems that true love can be found nowhere else save in married life. He cannot even contemplate the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. He emphasises the cultivation of domestic virtues of the home. He idealises married life. The kind of love that Tennyson upholds and likes is well exemplified in *The Miller's Daughter*. It is a simple story of true sweet-hearting and married love, but raised into a steady and grave emotion worthy of a love built to last for life betwixt a man and a woman. This was the kind of love that Tennyson eulogises and the Victorians very much thanked the poet for presenting the higher sense of love. Tennyson concentrates very firmly upon the advantages of spiritual as opposed to physical love, and the age felt satisfaction in his deli-

creation of love. The Victorian feeling is voiced by the poet when he says—

*Arise and fly  
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast,  
Move upward, working out the beast,  
And let the ape and tiger die.*

This inevitably leads us to the 'Victorian priggishness, which Tennyson reflects in his longer poems.

The Victorians who upheld moral virtues in domestic life were at heart moralists. They had a particular fascination for moralising and teaching lessons of morality to the younger generations. In this respect Tennyson is the mouthpiece of the Victorians. In Tennyson's poetry there is a strong feeling for moral preaching and ethical edification. He is a moralist giving to his readers the proper guidance for the wise conduct of life. Tennyson, to quote Grierson, "was determined to add the tin kettle of a didactic intention to the tails of his poem." He turned to the Greek legends not so much for the sake of their beauty as for their ethical significance. The legendary *Ulysses* imparts the message of action and urges the readers.

*To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

Tennyson believes that the aim of the poet should not be to provide aesthetic delight only. He is also a seer and a prophet, and as such his poetry should serve as an animating and enlivening force for his generation. In *The Palace of Art* the poet describes and condemns the spirit of aestheticism whose sole religion is the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sake.

"While, however, Tennyson's poetry is thus historically interesting on the social and political sides, it is even more important as a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. A careful student of science and philosophy, he was deeply impressed by the far-reaching meaning of the new discoveries and speculation by which the edifice of the old thought had been undermined, and especially by the wide bearings of the doctrine of evolution; and at once sceptical and mystical in his own temper, he was peculiarly fitted to become the mouthpiece

of his century's doubts, difficulties, and craving for the certainties of religious faith. The two voices of that century are perpetually heard in his work; in *In Memoriam*, more than in any contemporary piece of verse or prose, we may read of its great conflict of doubt and faith; while in many later poems as notably in *The Ancient Sage* we may see how the poet challenged the current materialism and asserted the eternal verities of God and immortality."

*There remains more faith in honest doubt  
Believe me than in half the creeds.*

But Tennyson does not, thereby, surrender the claims of religion, God and soul. He triumphantly declares his faith in God and the immortality of the soul and in a life beyond death. He advises the people of his age to cling to faith beyond all forms of faith, to trust in the large hope, to look to—

*One far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.*

In the *Higher Pantheism* he declares the 'supremacy of God and regards Him as the supreme controller of the universe—

*God is law, say the wise : O Soul, and let us rejoice  
For if He thunder by law the thunder is yet his voice.*

In every object of Nature and also in the sun, the moon and the stars the poet sees the vision of God—

*The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and  
the plains*

*Are not those a Soul ! the vision of Him who reigns.*

One result of the advance of science was the almost disappearance of imagination and emotion from the life of the age. This lack of imagination is found in Tennyson's descriptions of Nature, where nothing is left for the imagination and every object is minutely described with the precision and exactness of a scientist. In this respect Tennyson upholds the claim of science, though he sounds the final triumph of faith. It is, in fact, after passing through the vale of pessimism brought forth by the theories of science in *Maud* and *Locksley Hall* that Tennyson arrives at the truth of religion and declares in *In Memoriam*—

*Oh, yet we trust that some how good  
Will be the final goal of ill.*



The poet starts looking for some purpose behind the entire creation, and comes to the conclusion—

*That nothing walks with aimless feet  
That not one life shall be destroyed.*

Tennyson thus gives expression to the scientific spirit of the age, the unrest that is brought in *Maud* and *Locksley Hall*, and ultimately arrives at the haven of peace in *Higher Pantheism* and *In Memoriam*. In all these aspects it will be right for the future historian to treat Tennyson as a representative of the Victorian period. His finest poetry is undoubtedly “an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, of the temperament, and to some degree of the national character of his period.” In his verse he is truly “the glass of fashion and the mould of form” of the Victorian generation in the nineteenth century as Spenser was of the Elizabethan Court, Milton of the Protectorate and Pope of the reign of Queen Anne.

He presented in his poetry all the essential features of Victorian life, “the ideas and tastes, the inherited predilections belonging to his class and generation; moderation in politics, refined culture, religious liberalism chequered by doubt, a lively interest in the advance of scientific discovery coupled with alarm lest it should lead us astray, attachments to ancient institutions, larger views of duty, of state towards its people, and increasing sympathy with poverty and distress—all these Victorian feelings find expression in Tennyson’s poems.”

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**Q 6. Write a note on Tennyson as a Thinker with particular reference to his social outlook and attitude towards human life, his political views and his religious and philosophical thoughts.**

**Ans.** “As a thinker” says Albert, “Tennyson lacked depth and originality.” His social, political, religious, and philosophical thoughts were governed and dominated by the tendencies of his age. His thoughts fail to attract the modern readers for in them they scarcely find any spark of originality or progressive thinking. With these remarks let us now examine Tennyson’s attitude towards different aspects and thoughts of his age.

### **Social outlook and attitude towards human life**

In his social outlook and general attitude towards human life Tennyson was a conservative, an old fashioned gentleman, who looked with eyes of disfavour at any social progress that the masses might be able to achieve under the inspiring idealism of a democratic life. He was pretty conscious of the social problems rising out of the transformation of England from an agricultural country to an industrial country. The miseries and sufferings of the poor workers and labourers were before his eyes, but he was not sympathetically moved by their sufferings. Being a national poet, he apparently showed his concern with them and gave expression to his sympathy in such poems as *The Northern Cobbler*, *The Princess*, *Children's Hospital*, *Rizpah*, but his sympathy was merely lip-sympathy never emerging from a sincere feeling for their distress. Instead of holding the perverse social system responsible for the sufferings of the poor and the down-trodden, Tennyson considered that the sins of men were ultimately responsible for their sufferings. The tragedy of *Rizpah* was the result of robbery; the calamities of *Oenone* were the outcome of a husband who was an adulterer. The remedy that the poet suggested for removing social sufferings was not any reform in the malpractices and wrong adjustments of social life, but a reform of the moral conduct of the depraved human beings. If a man strictly followed the law of morality and led a disciplined life, he could pass through life's voyage smoothly.

Tennyson's treatment of social evils such as unemployment, low wages, drunkenness, poverty, squalor was unsatisfactory. His sympathies for the poor might have been genuine, but they have been put in the mouths of weak characters like the neurotic lover of Maud or the young but dismal prig in *Locksley Hall*. The feelings expressed by them do not appear to be the spontaneous feelings of a poet's heart. Commenting on the unsatisfactory handling of social problems a critic has very aptly remarked, "When (Tennyson) brings himself face to face with the actual details of life lived in poverty, squalor, and crime, he is sullenly uphopeful. In fact, he looks upon the whole question from the point of view of the comfortable burgess, not of the poor man himself who stand the grim of the actual sacrifice. He gazes

down from his sunny vantage ground of aesthetic refinement where no wind blows roughly. He never steps down into the thick of the struggle, and never makes those unjustly suffer feel that in him they have a comrade and a champion."

Tennyson's treatment of the one single burning problem of the 'new woman' and her position in human society in *the Princess* (1847) clearly shows that he was not prepared to grant women the same political and economic rights as man had in Victorian Society. In his view the role of woman was to look after the household and enjoy happy married life rather than vex her head with political rights and responsibilities. We hear the poet singing—

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth*  
*Man for the sword and for needle she*  
*Man with the head and woman with the heart*  
*Man to command and woman to obey.*

Tennyson's general attitude towards the masses and the poorer section of the community was one of supercilious disregard rather than genuine appreciation and sympathy. He had no real, warm and intimate sympathy with the common people. At heart Tennyson was an aristocratic English man and he insisted on maintaining social differences between the rich and the poor. He opposed the idea of levelling down all social distinctions. In fact, he was more interested in kings, princes, men and women of intellectual power and delicate refinement than with mediocres and common people having no standard and intellectual brilliance in them. He was drawn to an environment of culture and good lineage. King Arthur was obviously his ideal of manhood. The women whom he adored were gentle, patient and enduring souls. "When he touched the lives of the poor there was just a suspicion of the average well meaning district visitor about his tone." If he was attracted by the rank and file, it was only with the people who were quaint and eccentric particularly in their old age. He could laugh with the Northern Farmer for he was an old man with eccentric feelings. Eccentric youth only roused his impatience. If he treated the youthful idealist as in *Locksley Hall*, he only made him a prig. He was not at all attracted by the hot-blooded revolutionary, nor a visionary idealist. Elemental emo-

tions of youth had no attraction for him. "In his general outlook on life, he grew to distrust more and more, passion as an elemental force and strove to idealise and spiritualise it, whether as a force in political society or in sexual relationships."

In his attitude towards human life, Tennyson laid emphasis on law, order and discipline. Cultivation of moral values could alone bring about the salvation of human life. In his view:

*Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control*

*These three alone lead life to sovereign power.*

### **Tennyson's Political Views**

In his political views Tennyson was a conservative disdaining revolutionary changes in human society. While admitting the necessity of change, he insisted that change should be gradual and evolutionary in character. He was not at all in favour of a revolution that might upset the settled order of law and usher in the unhealthy rule of the mob. The sweeping tide of democracy bringing the common man to the forefront was looked upon with frowning eyes by the poet. He had no faith in democracy, equality or fraternity. He had something of a contempt for the people whom he designed as the 'rabblement'. He wrote in *Locksely Hall*—

*Slowly comes a hungry people as lion creeping nigher*

*Glares at one that nods and winks behind slowly dying fire.*

He had none of the revolutionary enthusiasm of Byron, nor could he breathe a feeling of righteous indignation at the deplorable state of the people sunk in the mire of poverty and disease. He upheld the old order based on class division rather than accepted a classless society. The radical democratic passion of Shelley, that sought to obliterate class division in the main, found no response in Tennyson's breast. "He was" to quote Compton-Rickett, "an aristocrat in feeling, and though quick to resent the abuse of class privileges had no more confidence in the voice of the people than Carlyle himself. Tennyson believed in the Great Man theory, though he never confounded 'Might with Right' to the same extent as the author of the *Latter Day Pamphlets*."

Tennyson believed in law, order and settled government. He loved and liked England for it was—

*A land of settled government*

*A land of first and old renown  
Where freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent.*

To quote Lyall, "In Tennyson we have the Englishman's ingrained abhorrence of unruly disorder, the tradition of a State well balanced, of liberty fenced in by laws, of veneration for the past; we have hatred of fanaticism in any shape, political or clerical, the distrust of popular impatience, the belief in the gradual betterment of human ills. When he was asked what politics he held, he answered characteristically, "I am of the same politics as Shakespeare, Bacon and every sane man."

Tennyson believed in the cultivation of one virtue, patriotism and love for England. In this respect he was a thoroughgoing Englishman. The sentiment of patriotism flourished best in his mind and we hear echoes of this patriotic love for his country in such lines as—

*There is no land like England  
Where'er the light of day be,  
There are no hearts like English hearts,  
Such hearts of Oak as they be  
There is no land like England  
Where'er the light of day be  
There are no men like Englishmen  
So tall and bold as they be.*

He showed the bulldog qualities of the English race and the militant nationalism of a powerful nation in such poems as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Ballad of the Fleet*, *The Defence of Lucknow*, *The Revenge*. "It is really a pity that Tennyson's patriotism should subserve so exclusively that rumpet and battleaxe and neglect the triumphs won outside of the battlefield."

In his foreign and imperial politics Tennyson had the vision of a narrow insular patriot who considered all foreigners as devils and all democratic movements on the continents as devilish. "The blind hysterics of the Celt" and "The blood on Seine" showed a grave narrowness of vision and limitation of sympathy. "It would have been better and the sweeter" says Compton-Rickett, "If Tennyson had understood other nationalities as well as he did his own race, since cosmopolitan sympathies strengthen in place of

weakening the spirit of patriotism." But Tennyson could not grow out his narrow nationalism and insular patriotism and if he had any praise, it was for his country only which he expressed with the air of a proud Englishman—

*It is the land that free men till  
That sober-suited Freedom chose  
The land, where girt with friends or foes  
A man may speak the thing he will.*

### **Tennyson's Religious and Philosophical Outlook**

"Harm has been done by those who have spoken of Tennyson's philosophy whether to exalt or belittle him", says Bradley, "for he was not a philosopher, any more than Wordsworth was or Browning or Meredith, though he shows, I think, more signs than they of the gift that makes a philosopher." As a religious and philosophical thinker Tennyson has expressed his thoughts on soul, God, union of the soul with the Divine Being, immortality of the soul, progress of the human race and the ultimate destiny of man and nature in the universe.

Tennyson lived at a time when the conflict between religion and science was coming to a head. Materialism was growing apace and shaking the very roots of religious faith and morality. People were fascinated more and more by the artificial glamour of material progress. Many religious men were tottering in their faith in face of the revolutionary and evolutionary theories of science. Tennyson, essentially a religious man at heart, was also affected by the new theories of science particularly by the theory of Evolution propounded by Darwin. The scientific ideas of the age affected him. "No poet was more exercised by religious problems than he; and no poet was more sensitive to scientific thought than he. But his attitude is an attitude of compromise; he propounds a *via media* between the materialistic science of his day and dogmatic Christianity." Tennyson's attitude was neither purely scientific nor purely religious. He equally welcomed the influence of historic Christianity and modern scientific thoughts. He stated—

*There remains more faith in honest doubt  
Believe me than in half the creeds.*

In an age when more of Science was colouring man's thoughts and demolishing his faith in God and His supremacy in

the universe, Tennyson had the courage to declare that God, the Almighty was the creator of the universe and the reflection of His personality was visible in all the physical and spiritual aspects of life. Man's soul was a part of the divine soul and had its being from the soul of God. The ultimate redemption of the human soul lay in its final merger with the divine soul of the universe. Man's birth upon the earth marked his division from the Divine :

*Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb*

*Are they not the sign and symbol of thy division from Him ?*

On one occasion Tennyson is reported to have said to a friend, "There is something that watches over us and our individuality endures; that is my faith, and that is all my faith."

Man should strive to be once again with the Almighty God and thereby attain the goal of union with the soul of the universe. This union of the human soul with the divine soul could be possible if man followed the path of morality, truth, righteousness and virtue. Only a life of morality and virtue could once again bring about the union of the human soul with divine soul, and his great effort in *In Memoriam* had been to prove that the dust returns to the dust, but the divine spark in man seeks to unite with the divine soul of the universe. He could never believe that the individual world may one day come to an end.

Tennyson confidently asserted that at the back of the universe there was God, who ruled over the entire world. In the *Higher Pantheism* he made his position very clear when he

*The sun, the moon, the stars the seas, the hills and the plains*

*Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns.*

Tennyson went a step further and admitted divine intervention in all the affairs of man. It was a debatable question whether God was in any way interested or interfered in the affairs of man. Scientists were not prepared to accept any divine intervention in human affairs; Tennyson upheld the view that God was interested in the affairs of man and His power was visible in human life. There was something like divine help or anger which human beings felt in their lives. "There is something that watches over us, and our individuality endures; that's my faith, and that's all my faith" he is reported to have said on one occasion to a friend. In the *Ancient Sage* we have the feeling that the activities of

human life were the result of the Divine presence sustaining the entire system of being :—

*If the Nameless should withdraw from all  
Thy frailty counts most real, all thy world  
Might vanish like the shadow in the dark.*

All the visible things were the signs and shadows of the invisible, the intimations of some eternal power or Divinity. If He withdraws Himself from the objects of the world, the entire cosmos shall vanish like a shadow vanishing in the darkness.

Tennyson believed that so long as the universe was governed by God, the progress of the human race was certain, though the course of progress might be chequered. Progress would be slow, but ultimately man would rise to heights of his spiritual glory. In the posthumous volume he wrote of a time when the moans of the earth which now whirls through space would have grown 'sphere' music, and man would evolve to higher heights—

*While the races flower and fade  
Prophet eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the shade  
Till the people all are one, and all their voice's blend in choric  
Hallelujah to the Maker, 'It is finished, man is Made.'* ♦

But this hope for the ultimate perfectability of man was by no means the main element of Tennyson's faith. The main pillars of his faith were his belief in the guidance of the universe by a God who is Love, in the revelation of God's love and the divine law through Christ; in the immortality of the human spirit, leading to some kind of 'closing' with the divine personality, and in the freedom of the human will.

"Tennyson has been called a mystic; it would be more correct to say he was mystical" says Compton-Rickett; for we do not find in Tennyson the kind of mysticism we notice in Vaughan, George Herbert and Blake. He was at his best "a rationalist with a tenacious strain of mysticism in his nature. No thoroughgoing mystic would have dealt at such length and with such significant emphasis, upon the difficulties of religious faith; no thoroughgoing rationalist would have tried to solve the difficulties by claiming for the intuition of the heart, a way out of the morass of scepticism." The only trace of mysticism to be found in his



poetry is his faith, in the power of intuition to solve all difficulties coming in the way of a man of faith. In his mystical way Tennyson thought that intuition could solve all the problems of human life.

Tennyson was through and through a religious minded man. He believed that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill." It was not a philosophy of faith so much as a philosophy of hope. The poet hoped that things would take a turn for the good. Tennyson had to struggle hard for his faith against personal doubts raised by Science. His ultimate faith was,

*That God, which ever lives and loves  
One God, one law, one element,  
The one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.*

Tennyson had certain philosophical thoughts which he had expressed with great force in *Ulysses* and *In Memoriam*. He believed in action and *Ulysses* is a standing monument in the glorification of action even in the face of death and decay. He laid emphasis on 'to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.' He advocated pursuit of knowledge and higher values of life—

*To follow knowledge, like a sinking star  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

Tennyson laid equal emphasis on the cultivation of love. He conceived of God as the embodiment of love. *In Memoriam* opens with the line:—

*Strong Son of God, immortal love.*

As a philosopher Tennyson believed in the freedom of Human will. In *In Memoriam* he expressed his faith in free will in the following line:—

*Our wills are ours, we know not how.*

He propagated the doctrine of free will because without granting the principle of the free will, the doctrine of moral responsibility would be meaningless.

Another aspect of his philosophy was that 'men may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things.' This is well expressed in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson believed in the gospel of progress and advancement in human life. He believed in evolution rather than revolution. It was his faith that man and

things were imperceptibly aspiring to a higher state. This evolutionary process of moral progress is the sheet anchor of Tennyson's transcendentalism. His faith in life beyond life and life beyond death is expressed in *Sir Galahad*, *Enoch Arden*, and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*.

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**Q. 7. Write a note on Tennyson as an Artist touching upon his achievements as (1) A Metrical artist (2) A Pictorial artist (3) An Artist in general.**

Or

**Do you agree with the view that Tennyson inspite of his merits as a Thinker was essentially a poet and an artist ?**

**Ans.** Tennyson was primarily a poet and an artist, and it is as a poet and skilled craftsman in verse that he will be remembered in future years to come. No doubt his poetry is a clear reflection of his thoughts on the social, economic and political problems of his day, yet his fame does not rest on his thoughts, but on his achievements as an Artist. As a thinker he was not of the first order. Albert says, "As a thinker Tennyson lacked depth and originality." Harold Nicholson points out, "Tennyson was unfortunately a very inferior intellectual thinker." His thoughts on the political, social, and religious problems do not have any depth, profundity and originality. All his thoughts are of his age and were commonly shared by the people of his time. The merit of Tennyson lies in giving them a poetic form and shape. There is nothing impressive about them. In spite of his treatment of the problem of democracy, rights and position of women, commercial aristocracy, immortality of the soul, the supremacy of God as creator of the universe, we do not seem to be satisfied with what he says except in a general way. Some of his views, as for example, on the position and privilege of women and the common people have become outmoded and unprogressive. They have no appeal to the modern men and women. Hence if the greatness of Tennyson is to be judged purely on the basis of his thoughts and ideas on the problems of his age, he will not be able to occupy a significant place in the galaxy of English poets. We will call him a chronicler of his times, who just chose to be a poetic bard of his age and nothing more. But that is

not the case with Tennyson. In spite of his being a Victorian poet voicing in poetry the hopes and aspirations of the people of his times, Tennyson enjoys his fame and name. It is not by what he 'said' but by how he said it that Tennyson has been able to win for himself a host of admirers. It is the manner, the poetic style, and the skilled craftsmanship of the poet that have earned for him a lasting place among the poets of his country. It is by virtue of his qualities as a consummate artist that he is remembered and adored to-day. R. C. Jebb writes, "The gifts by which Tennyson has and will keep his place among the great poets of England are pre-eminently those of an artist." R. Brimley Johnson says, "Tennyson was before all things a flawless artist."

#### As a metrical Artist

Tennyson's mastery of rhythm and metre is commendable. "Here is the absolute sway of metre, compelling every rhyme and measure needful to the thought; here are sinuous alliterations, unique and varying breaks and pauses, winged flights and falls, the glory of sound and colour everywhere present." From the beginning of his poetic career Tennyson exhibited his interest in metrical experiments. His first volume, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* published in 1830, at the age of twenty one, showed that the poet had mastered the principles of English prosody and had understood how those principles could actually be applied in poetic composition. In these early poems every variety of rhythm was dexterously employed, though the 'rising' foot was more common than the 'falling'. Both dactyls and anapaests were freely used to give the air of rhythm, speed and lightness.

Tennyson's second volume of poems published in 1842 indicated that the poet's grasp of structure and rhythm was steadily increasing. The *Lady of Shalott* was the triumph of metrical art. The entire poem was written in a stanza of seven lines, the first four all with the same rhyme-ending, and a refrain after the third and fourth lines. It was a difficult metre but Tennyson handled it with great lightness and freedom. *The Two Voices* in the form of a dialogue between the tempter and the man bent upon suicide, was composed in a stanza of three short lines with a single rhyme and sledge hammer regularity which gave to the dialogue a great force. In the *Lotos-Eaters* the skill

of the poet matured. The introductory lines are in the Spenserian stanza. 'The choric song' is written in iambic lines which vary in length between three feet and seven feet. The rhythm is considerably manipulated by the inversion of iambics into troches. The poem forestalls the method of *Maud*. The rhythm is adapted successfully to the fluctuating emotions of the theme. The movement of the lines is in conformity with the thoughts of the mariners. In adjusting the thoughts with the rhythm of the lines Tennyson achieved great success.

In *In Memoriam* Tennyson perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with enclosed rhymes (ab ba). Instead of being monotonous the stanza proved to be eminently successful. The quatrain stanza of *In Memoriam* had earlier been used by Lord Herbert of Cherbury and by Ben Jonson, but Tennyson stole a march over them by manipulating the rhythm.

In *Maud* Tennyson produced a lyrical monologue of 1200 lines representing the story of love, death and madness. The metre of *Maud* is iambic but it is plentifully varied with anapaests. The lines vary in length from six feet to three and the rhyme schemes are exceedingly fluid and so well managed that, although the rhyme is hardly ever obtrusive, it never fails to act as an effective link in the chain of sound. By these means Tennyson evolved a form of extraordinary speed, fluency and adaptability.

Tennyson employed blank verse in *The Princess*, *English Idyll* and *Idylls of the King*. Blank verse had been used by the Elizabethans and by Milton. Tennyson's blank verse has a natural freedom, simplicity and tenderness. When his theme is reflective and oratorical, the blank verse becomes, "melodious, sonorous, variously paused and felicitously drawn into paragraph. In narrative pieces like *Morte D' Arthur* it has strength and condensation whereas in *Ulysses* it has epic grandeur, sublimity and slow movement." "Tennyson's blank verse" says Charles Tennyson in *Six Tennyson's Essays* "has not the majesty of Milton's, nor the rhetorical splendour and freedom of Shelley's, nor the natural eloquence and dignity of Wordsworth's; but it has striking merits of its own chief among which are, I think, its amazing flexibility, and its power of achieving, through rhythm and vowel music, a lyrical, singing quality which no other poet has attained in the

same degree." "Tennyson's blank verse" says Compton-Rickett, "is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival, and to rival it one must go back to Milton."

Tennyson's great merit as a metrical artist lies in three directions. In the first place he knew the art of adapting sound to sense. The movement of his lines exactly reflects the sense. This is presented in a remarkable manner in the opening lines of the *Lotos Eaters*, where an atmosphere of sleepiness and drowsiness is being produced by the use of drowsy and soft syllables. Nicholson says, "One has only to read the painting, spasmodic interjection of *Maud* or the frenzied sweep of *Boadicea*, the rattling galliambics of which, so unlike the effeminacy of the *Attila* have all the fire of Borodin's *Igor*, to realise what a remarkable talent Tennyson possessed for accomodating the movement of his verse to its subject, for making the gradation of his theme by the subltler changes of key and intonation." Secondly, Tennyson was the master in the subtle and pervading employment of alliteration. This exhibits his manual dexterity, but alliteration is employed with rare skill by the poet—

*The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
and murmuring of innumerable bees.* (The Princess).

Lastly, Tennyson's mastery in vowel-music is unparalleled in Victorian poetry. "Dexterous manipulation of vowel sounds constitutes Tennyson's most original contribution to the harmonics of English language." He took great pains to avoid harsher guturals and sibilants from his verse. It was his perfection of vowel balance which made his poetry musical. It was by the shifting of the stress, by the interchanges of vowel sounds and by the use of alliteration, that Tennyson was able to vary the inherent monotony of *In Memoriam*, and add richness to the melody of *Lotos Eaters*. The sense of music is equally conspicuous in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers long in the mind. This is, in the main, due to his selection of melodious vowels and liquid consonants, and also to his skilful use of alliteration. Lastly his use of onomatopoeic words—(through zig-zag paths and justs of pointed rocks) enhances the sweet harmony of his use. An example of Tennyson's

use of vowel-music is given from *Lotos-Eaters* to show how masterly did he use this device to create music in poetry—

*And thro' the moss ivies creep,*

*And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,*

*And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.*

As a musician in words Tennyson will always be loved. His is the song the sirens sing. He carries his measures like a flowing stream through the ups and downs of rhythmic scales. His melodies vibrating and quivering sweetly resound in the ears, and the high soaring flights of his rapturous chants entrance the hearts of the readers,

Summing up, we can say that Tennyson, "was one of the most skilful metrists among English poets and could turn out fascinating exercises in odd rhythms. He could write in 1868 such a poem as *Lucretious*, the most daring and complex of his dramatic monologues. And the same poet could write the rollicking narrative ballad *The Revenge* and the two lively satirical dialect monologues *Northern Farmer : Old Style* and *Northern Farmer : New Style*. If he had lacked complexity, and, at times emotional discipline, he could show himself master of the simple mood-lyric, a brilliant manipulator of language to the ear, and a conscientious craftsman who could work up a remarkably high polish to his work. He remains one of the most skilful and within the area he chose to cultivate one of the most professionally competent."\*

#### As A Pictorial Artist

Tennyson was a great pictorial artist. He was gifted with unrivalled powers of picturing a scene, a landscape, a person in words marked with clarity and vividness. This art of pictorial painting was learnt by the poet quite early in his life by keeping Keats' pictorial paintings as his models. His art was essentially picturesque and he used words as the painter employs his brush for conveying the impression of a scene in all its vivid glory and colour. Steadman's significant remarks in *Victorian Poets* regarding Tennyson's pictorial powers are worth quoting. He says, "Leaving the architecture of Tennyson's poetry and coming to the sentiment which it seeks to express we are struck at once by the fact that an idyllic or picturesque mode of conveying that

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\* David Daiches: *A Critical History of English Literature*, Volume II.

sentiment is the one natural to his poet, if not the only one permitted by his limitations." Leaving aside Shakespeare, Spenser, Keats, no poet was able to draw such gorgeous pictures of landscapes as Tennyson did. Nearly all Tennyson's poems, even the simplest, are rich in ornate descriptions of natural and other scenes. "His method" says Albert, "is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before the reader's eye."

*The Princess* is rich in pictures of beauty and loveliness. The finest pictorial painting of landscape is seen in *The Lotos-Eaters*, where the poet draws the picture of the island in all the richness of nature's scenery. It was a land of streams in which the Lotos-Eaters found themselves—

*A land of streams ! some, like a downward smoke  
Slow-dropping veils of thinn'st lawn, did go;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke  
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.*

*The Lady of Shalot* is rich in splendid descriptions. The opening lines of this poem vividly catch the scene—

*On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;  
And thro' the fold the road runs by  
To many-towered Camelot.*

His pictures of Nature in *In Memoriam* are quite significant and reflect the calmness of grief and provide an appropriate ground to human sentiment—

*Calm is the morn without a sound,  
Calm as to suit a calmer grief.  
And only through the faded leaf  
The chestnut pattering to the ground.*

Tennyson remained through out his career as a poet the superb master of imaginative descriptions. His *Eagle* is a poem of six lines, but it is a fine piece of pictorial painting. It leaves a picture which cannot be forgotten;

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands  
Close to the sun in lonely lands  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

*A Dream of Fair Women* is almost wholly composed of imaginative descriptions. *O Enone* has fine array of pictures, like that suggested by the scenery of the Pyreness:—

*The long brook falling this the c'ov'n ravin  
In cataract after cataract to the sea.*

### As An Artist in General

Tennyson was an artist of a high order, and he cultivated the art of poetic composition with great labour and industry. Like Keats he was a conscious and deliberate artist spending considerable time and energy in perfecting the form and the style of poetic expression. His ideal of poetry was that it should be simple, sensuous and pictorial. *The Poet's Mind* reveals his conception of his art as a poet. In his view poetry should be transparent, flowing, and crystal clear like the waters of a limpid stream. In conformity with his principles he developed his artistic qualities in a particular pattern of thought emphasising on the necessity of cultivating the quality of simplicity, lucidity, charity, sublimity, unity and completeness.

In Tennyson's art the first thing that strikes us is *simplicity*. Nothing was ever done by the poet for effect. His style has the stamp of simplicity, though simplicity never borders on the land of baldness. "Vital sincerity or living correspondence between idea and form, that absolute necessity for all fine art as for noble life, was his, and it is contained in his simplicity."

Clarity and lucidity are other traits of Tennyson's art. He never involved himself like Browning in the obscure and thorny depths of metaphysics and theology. Stopford A. Brooke rightly says, "Deliberately he did not attempt to write about that which he could not express with lucidity of thought and form. He determined to be clear."

A sense of beauty and adoration of the beautiful aspects of nature and human life characterised Tennyson's art. He was a votary of beauty. He possessed an unfailing instinct for form in beauty. He had the power of shaping beauty and loveliness in nature and human life. "His love of the skilfulness of art, the



careful study of words and their powers in verse, his mingled strength and dainties—all his technique was not for its own sake, but was first urged by his love of beauty.” Tennyson’s adoration of beauty was very much like that of Keats. His cult of beauty is embodied in three poems—*The Poet*, *The Poet’s Mind*, and *The Poet’s Song*. He is highly sensitive to all forms of beauty—physical as well as spiritual, and is a true artist in the adoration of beauty.

Tennyson’s art has the stamp of sublimity, stateliness and dignity about it. Nothing is written in a plebeian style. He avoids all that is commonplace, and presents ordinary ideas in a dignified way. He is a fastidious artist who believes in perfect finish. “Tennyson was one of those poets who, like Milton and Wordsworth, consider themselves as consecrated spirits. This sense of their vocation makes them reverence their work rather than themselves. It imparts stateliness to their verse, gives it a moral virtue, a spiritual strength, and emerges in a certain grandeur or splendour of style.”

One of the greatest qualities of Tennyson as an artist is that his poems, especially shorter ones, are marked with a note of unity of impression and soundness of construction. Though Tennyson’s longer poems may be wanting in this unity of impression and construction, yet the lighter pieces, like *Ulysses*, *The Two Voices*, *The Vision of Sin* owe a great deal of their charm to the unity of impression which they convey. “The best proof of the great advance which Tennyson had made in the art of construction is to be found in *The Lotos-Eaters*, a piece which can hardly be paralleled except in Spenser or in Thomson’s *Castle of Indolence*.”

Tennyson’s exquisite polish, chiselled phrases, and perfection of form are remarkable qualities of his art. “With the exception of Gray” says Grierson, “English {poetry had produced nothing since Milton that is so obviously the result of strenuous and unwearied pursuit of perfection of form.” He gave considerable thought to the art of expression, and he succeeded in coining phrases like “jewels five words long”—with the dexterity of a skilled craftsman. He spared no pains to impart the best finish and perfection to his pieces of poetic art by revising, rewriting

original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth, of Milton in grandeur and lovely sublimity; of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of nature behind the veil, of Shelley in unearthliness, and of Keats in voluptuous spontaneity, yet deserves to be ranked with the best of these except Shakespeare only in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art."

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**Q. 8. Write a short essay on Tennyson as a Lyric Poet.**

**Or**

**Comment on Tennyson's Lyrical excellence.**

**Ans** Tennyson was by temperament a lyrical poet. He had been endowed with all those qualities which would have made him the supreme lyric poet of his country, but unfortunately the poet did not strictly follow the lyric force of his genius and allowed his lyric energy to be obscured by less vital elements. Instead of remaining a singer voicing forth the subjective feelings that welled in his heart, he chose to be a dramatist, a narrative poet, an ethical teacher, and a communal bard. This association of Tennyson with other energies (ethical, theological, didactic) along with his lyrical energy certainly bedimmed the glory of his lyrical genius, and made him more of a philosophic thinker than a pure lyric poet. Had he realised that what he *felt* was infinitely more important than what he *thought*, he would have been another Shelley or Swinburne in English lyric poetry. But Tennyson was forced by circumstances into fifty years of unnatural objectivity. "He chose the easier and more prosperous course" says Harold Nicholson, "of becoming the Laureate of his age. He subordinated the lyric to the instructional. His poetry thereby has lost one half of its potential value."

In spite of the fact that Tennyson allowed his lyric genius to be dominated by philosophic thoughts, yet his lyric flow could not be completely ebbcd, and from time to time the poet composed songs and lyrics of exquisite beauty and loveliness. The restraining force of caution and philosophy could not chill the ardour of his soul, and lyrics and songs continued to flow from his pen right up from the age of seventeen to the ripe old age of

eighty. Tennyson could keep up his power for melody and song even to the age of eighty. During the long span of his poetic career he produced such fine pieces of lyricism as *Mariana*, *Ortana*, *Fatima*, *Merman and Mermaid*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Break-Break-Break*, *The Dream of Fair Women*, *Locksley Hall*, *The Brooke*, *The Splendour falls on castle walls*, *Tears*, *Idle Tears*, *Come into the Garden—Maud*, *O Swallow*, *Swallow*. These songs and lyrics attract us by their luscious melody, their tilting music, their Aeolic chiselling of phrase and their exquisite finish. These lyrics are masterpieces of his genius. Commenting on the greatness of these lyrics and songs a critic has aptly pointed out, "Tennyson's genius is lyrical. He has the great gift of song, though without the rapture that sometimes attends it. Whatever he touches, he transmutes into a sweet melody, simple and personal, or rich and sonorous."

Tennyson's lyrics are extremely melodious and musical. The poet has a trained and refined ear for music and metrical harmony, and the metrical flow of his lines is completely free from the defects of rhythm and melody. He knows the art of harmonising the sense with the sound of the words employed in his lyrics. Dunn rightly writes, "He is a great poet because he is a great artist, a master of words and metres, a maker of magical music."

This lyrical gift is nowhere so well employed as in giving expression to a sense of loss, recollected after the occasion of grief, and brooded over intellectual anguish and stoical suffering. This feeling mingles with the voices of the sea or the mists of the air or finds illustration in many pictures from Nature. In a more joyous mood the poet enables us to see the idyllic side of English life—its quite rural scenery, rich perfumes of summer or the rare tints of autumn.

Tennyson's lyrics and songs, in spite of all the eulogy that they have won from critics and admirers of his poetry, cannot be placed in the first rank of lyrics and songs. As Albert points out, "On the whole his nature was too self-conscious and perhaps his life too regular and prosperous to provide a background for the true lyrical intensity of emotion." The lyrics of Tennyson, with all their charm, hardly scale the radiance of a lyric by Sappho or

Sophocles. They fail to move us and strike a sympathetic chord in our heart. Even some of the lyrics of pathos and mourning fail to move us. Oliver Elton is of the opinion that Tennyson is more at home in classical lyrics—odelike or commemorative—carefully concerted pieces, be the short or long with full rolling lines than in the briefer spontaneous kind. Rarely his songs attain the same intensity as the songs of Burns, Scott and Shelley do. Their pathetic strains do not move us to pity and despair. Even the music of Tennyson's loveliest songs is somewhat languorous. It is—

*Music that gentlier on the spirit lies*

*Thun tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.*

The music is a little cloying. The songs fail to appeal to our feelings. "No one can dispute the feeling of Tennyson's lyric, but it is usually clothed in such subtle graces of fancy, in such artful cadences, in such enamelled colouring, that it strikes the imagination more than the heart." Even the music fails to attract, for it appears the music of recitation, of memory, of thought, rather than of song. The songs of Burns as 'My love is like a red, red rose' or 'The devil came fydling through the town' are more attractive and appealing than the songs of Tennyson. In them we feel the lack of feeling and genuine emotion which we come across in Shakespeare's songs such as 'Full Fathom five Thy Father lies' or 'Tell me where is Fancy bred'. Tennyson's songs and lyrics thus fail to appeal to our heart with the same intensity and emotional force as the lyrics of Burns and Shelley appeal us. But comparisons are odious. Tennyson in spite of the shortcomings in his art is a lyrical poet and some of his lyrics and songs will continue to provide a feast of delight to the readers for they have at least the gift of melody in them.

**Q. 9. Give a brief account of the Poetical and Dramatic works of Robert Browning (1812—89)**

**Ans.** Robert Browning, the great Victorian poet, began his poetic career under the inspiring example of P. B. Shelley, the sun-treader. His earliest work in poetry is *Pauline* (1833). It was published when the poet had attained the age of twenty one. The poem is a monologue addressed to Pauline on 'the incidents

in the development of a soul.' It is autobiographical in tone like Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Browning the artist and the thinker is here veiled in embryo. The book did not sell at all and Browning, later on, decided to withdraw it from circulation. However at the insistence of his friends it was allowed to be in circulation and later on it attracted attention. Browning's next important work in poetry was *Paracelsus* (1835). It is a drama with four characters and is, again, a story of 'incidents in the development of a soul.' It is the study of Paracelsus, a famous chemist of the Renaissance times, half mystic, half charlatan (1493—1541) who

*Determined to be*

*The greatest and most glorious man on earth.*

Through the mouth of Paracelsus Browning poured forth with inexhaustible eloquence his own ideas and aspirations. "Paracelsus is the victim of his high ambition, which is to attain truth and transform the life of a man. For the sake of this ideal he commits the blunder of rejecting emotion and eschewing love. Too late he understands his mistake. His failure is glorious but he fails. This enormous poem by a young man is astonishingly spirited and deeply imbued with philosophy. As a work of art it suffers from its very richness and redundancy and from its lack of controlling form and outline."\*

In 1840 Browning produced *Sordello* representing the life of a little known Italian poet in a language and style that could not be comprehended even by the best of literary men of the times. Browning deals in this poem the relationship between art and life. The poem is rich in allusions and historical references, and some of them are so obscure that even modern scholars with their crusading zeal for research have not been able to find their exact source. The work failed to attract attention and was considered a derelict in the ocean of poetry. Tennyson complained that he understood only two lines of *Sordello*—the first, "Who will may hear Sordello's story told" and the last, "Who would has heard 'Sordello's story told'"—and that they were both lies.

In 1842 Browning produced *Dramatic Lyrics* followed by *Dramatic Romances* and *Lyrics* in 1845. In these dramatic lyrics

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\* Lagouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

there is more of artistic pleasure than was provided by Browning in the early philosophical works of his life. Among the lyrics of this volume the most significant are *Evelyn Hope*, *In a Gondola*, *porphyria's Lover*, *The Pied piper of Hamelin*, *Meeting at Night*, *Parting at Morning*, *By the Fireside*, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*.

In *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* the majority of the poems are narratives or monologues including such well known poems as *My Last Duchess*, *The Italian in England*, *The Last Ride Together*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *The Heretic's Tragedy*, *The Statue and the Bust* *Holy Cross Day*.

In 1855 Browning brought out *Men and Women*. It was dedicated to Elizabeth Barret Browning. In the dedication Browning wrote :

*These they are my fifty men and women  
Naming we the fifty poems finished !  
Take them, Love, the book and me together,  
Where the heart lies let the brain lie also.*

The study of human character in this volume is deep and profound. "With keen, tireless curiosity he brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us, some drawn from history, others imaginary, some good, some bad,—all unravelling, thanks to the clear-sighted poet, the tangled skein of their emotions and actions. Browning appears to give them wide scope and let them say what they like but in fact he guides their confidences in the direction of his own philosophy of energy and freedom, and towards that faith in life, in the spiritual essence and immortality of the soul, which is the basis of his generous optimism"\*

In *Dramatic Personae* (1864) Browning carried forward his study of human beings and produced a number of dramatic monologues such as *Caliban upon Setebos*, *Bishop Bloughram's Apology*, *Abt Vogler*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and *A Death in the Desert*. These monologues are intellectual and philosophical in character. The lyricism of the *Dramatic Lyrics* is on the wane in this volume.

In 1868—69 Browning produced *The Ring and the Book*. "Here the story of the trial of Pompilie, accused of her husband Guido of adultery with the young monk Caponsacchi, is set forth

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\* Legouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

in ten long successive monologues by the principal actors, witnesses, and bystanders in the drama. Each section repeats the story of the same events, varying it according to the different interests or prejudices of the speaker; the poem shows, indeed, a startling defiance of moderation. The repetition justifies itself by the light it throws on the various characters and also by its psychological purpose which is to show the distortion of facts and motives as they are interpreted by a group of human beings. But it is impossible to deny either the fault of prolixity which results from such a process or the amazing virtuosity of the poet and the magnificent effects he achieved in the principal depositions."

The last twenty years of the poet's life were prolific in books varying in character from *Finfine at the Fair* (1872) and *Red Cotton Night Cup Country* (1873) to *Asolando* in 1889, the year of his death. "All these works" says Albert, "suffer from the writer's obsession with thought content, and the psychologizing of his characters at the expense of the poetry. In too many of them the style betrays wilful eccentricities which he had once turned to such great account, but always the reader is liable to stumble across passages, which, in striking landscape or lovely lyric show that the true poetic gift is not completely absent."

Besides composing lyrics and dramatic monologues Browning also penned a few dramas at intervals. He brought all his dramas in a collection known as *Bells and Pomegranates*. Browning is the author of eight plays. These are, in order, *Strafford* (1837), *Pippa Passes* (1841), *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *A Blot in the Scutcheon* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* (1844), *A Soul's Tragedy* (1846), *Luria* (1846), *In a Balcony* (1853).

*Strafford* is a tragedy in five acts, dealing with the life of Strafford who sacrificed his life for King Charles I. The devotion and faithfulness of this statesman are well represented in the tragedy. *Pippa Passes* is one of the finest works of Browning. It deals with the life of Pippa, a little factory girl and the joys of her life. The dramatic element in *Pippa Passes* is very little. It is the most unactable of Browning's plays. But its real charm lies in its lyric beauty, insight, idyllic charm and passion. The entire

play consists of four successive episodes in each of which Pippa's song as she passes strikes into a fateful situation and precipitates the issue. One of the songs of Pippa—

*God's in His heaven*

*All's right with the world.*

represents Browning's attitude towards life.

Of the remaining plays the most interesting and readable is *A Blot in the Scutcheon*. The scene of this play is English and the period is eighteenth century. It is a tragedy of love and the basis of the play is family pride and honour. The play bears a close resemblance to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Browning's dramas did not attract much attention and are a failure as drama. The two basic pillars of Drama are plot and action. Drama demands a sustained plot and a rapid action. Drama may be defined 'as an articulate story presented in action.' In Browning's plays we have a story. It is articulate also, but it is not presented through action. It is given only spasmodically in action. Browning is more interested in the psychology and motives of his characters than in their action. It is this lack of action in Browning's plays that mars their success. Browning is retrospective, reminiscent and analytical. The presence of too much analysis and thinking in his plays is responsible for the failure of his dramas. "In a play which is to be seen, and where the *doing* has to effect us, not the thinking, it is a serious drawback. Browning is not a dramatist but a dramatic philosopher. Accept this stand point and his plays are interesting enough—some intensely interesting, but it is at its best the interest of the study rather than of the theatre."\* E. Albert directs our attention to the shortcomings of Browning as a dramatist in the following words—"Browning lacks the fundamental qualities of the dramatist. His amazingly subtle analysis of character and motive is not adequate for true drama because he cannot reveal character in action. His method is to take a character at a moment of crisis and, by allowing him to talk, to reveal not only his present thoughts and feelings but his past history."

The style of Browning is also responsible for his failure as a Dramatist. The style in his plays is terse and compact. It is

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\* Compton-Rickett—A history of English Literature



not flexible. The simple factory girl Pippa and the magnificent Ottimo use the English language with the same ease and fluency. This appears unconvincing. His characters further bear a family likenesses. They are repetitions in different forms. Browning's plays tend to become one-character plays. 'It is the proverbial predominance of Hamlet repeated in play after play.' For all these reasons Browning's dramas are failures on the stage and are at best 'closet plays' to be read and enjoyed in one's private study chamber.

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**Q. 10. Give your estimate of Browning as the poet of Love**

**Ans.** Browning is one of the greatest love poets in English poetry. He is not concerned with divine love or the love of God, love of country, love of family, but with only one kind of love—the love between man and woman. He has produced a host of poems dealing with love on the physical plain. "The love poems of Browning" says Stopford A. Brooke, "do not mean those poems which deal with absolute love or the love of the ideas as truth and beauty or love of mankind or country, but it *means the isolating passion of one sex for the other chiefly in youth whether moral or immoral.*" Browning's poems of love give expression to all phases of physical love varying from the fierce animal passion of Ottima in *Pippa Passes* to the romantic love or Queen worship of *The Last Ride Together* and *Rudel To The Lady of Tripoli*.

Browning's love poetry is intensely realistic in character. A man loves a woman not for her spiritual qualities, but for her physical charm and passion. Browning's heroes love their beloveds because they are women with passion, having all the persuasive charms of winning ladies. In short, a man loves a woman not because she is a goddess, but because she is a real woman, "with her curls, her dented chin, her little tricks of speech, all the causeless laughters, the little private jokes and common memories that are the stuff of intimacy. That is the real thing, and in that kind of love poetry, Browning is a master."\* Realism is the central working force of Browning's love poetry. The imagery of

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\* Grierson and Smith : A Critical History of English Poetry.

his love poetry is that of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, and fashionable furcoats. "Browning's love poetry is the finest in the world because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven" says G. K. Chesterton, "but about window panes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal with abstractions. It is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when *common and dead things* had meaning beyond the power of any millionaire to compute." The realistic imagery of *A Lover's Quarrel* exhibits Browning's preoccupation with real things of the world.

Browning *intellectualises* the passion of love. The lovers of Browning provide a psychological analysis of their love, and this analysing and psychologising of love is present in *The Last Ride Together* and *Porphyria's Lover*. His lovers indulge in dissecting and discussing their love. In Browning's poetry of love there is nothing of that deep, tormented, sensual strain that at once attracts or repels in John Donne; but there is the same activity of intellect and the same rush of thought which we come across in poems like *Twickenham Garden*.

Browning mostly dwells on the power wielded by women in sex-life. He does not emphasise the physical charms of his women, nor does he introduce like Keats 'light feet and creamy breasts' but he lays stress on the power of women to transform and transfigure man's life. This aspect of Browning's women is well brought out in *By the Fire Side*, *Evelyn Hope* and *Andrea Del Sarto*.

Browning employs the dramatic method in the presentation of his love-poems. Pure lyricism in love is subdued by the dramatic force with which the reactions of his men and women are presented in his poems of love like *The Last Ride Together*. Most of the love poems of Browning are in the form of Dramatic monologues, and even the lyrics have a dramatic touch behind them.

Browning's love poetry is both complex and comprehensive dealing with cases of successful as well as unsuccessful love. Of the poems whose subject is physical love, about two third represent the feelings of man, and one third the feelings of woman. The

love poems thus deal more with man's feelings than woman's. The love of man is partly successful and partly unsuccessful and as such some poems are poems of successful love, while others are marked with a note of despair. Among the successful poems of love we have *By the Fireside*, *Respectability* and *One Word More*. Poems marked with a note of failure and despair are *Love among the Ruins*; *In a Gondola*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *A Lover's Quarrel*, *Love in a Life*, *One Way of Love*.

Poems dealing with the love of women can also be divided into two parts. (1) Successful love poems (2) unsuccessful love poems. The successful love poems in which women have succeeded are *Parting at Morning*, *A woman's Last Word*, *Any Wife to Any Husband*, *Count Gismond*. Poems in which women have met buffets of fortune are *The Laboratory* and *In a Year*. Love poems dealing with woman's passion lack that width of view and intellectual power which we notice in poems dealing with the love of men.

All love poems of Browning whether dealing with cases of successful love or failure in love end on a note of optimism and triumph. The triumphant note is nicely sounded in the concluding lines of *Evelyn Hope*, where the old man puts a scroll in the "sweet cold hand" of his dead beloved hoping that some day when she awakes she "will remember and understand." The lover in *Last Ride Together* is optimistic and the poem ends on a note of hope—

*What if we still ride on, we two  
With life for ever old yet new,  
Changed not in kind but in degree,  
The instant made eternity,  
And Heaven just prove that I and she  
Ride, ride, together, for ever ride ?*

Browning lays emphasis on married love and like Donne he is the chosen poet of wedded love. This is well presented in *By The Fireside*. The motto of Browning's love poetry is well put in the beautiful stanza from *By The Fireside*—one of the noblest and truest he ever penned—

*Oh, the little more and how much it is !  
And the little less, and what worlds away !*

*How a sound shall quicken content to bliss  
Or a breath suspended the blood's best play  
And life be a proof of this.*

Compton-Rickett has beautifully summed up Browning's position as a love poet in the following words—"Certain aspects of love have been more finely rendered by other poets; but in range of matter Browning has no superior. There are abysses of tragic horror, agonies of sense and spirit, at which he took no more than a glimpse. It was not in his nature to dwell on them. His splendid vitality and buoyant hopefulness recoiled from them. His art as a poet of love suffers limitations to that extent, but the underlying inspiration is the greater. For his outlook on love is the outlook of a man who puts it in front of any other thing in life as a force for sanctifying and strengthening the soul."

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**Q 11. Write a note on Browning's philosophy of Life with particular reference to his optimism.**

**Ans.** Robert Browning did not belong to any school of philosophy nor was he the disciple of any philosopher. He had thought deeply and calmly on the problems of life, and had come to certain conclusions about the values of spiritual and physical life. Browning's conclusions about life have a philosophical touch, and the thinking and intellectual element in them is of a high order. The study of his philosophic poems like *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler* and *Asolando* bring out his philosophical thoughts in a clear and unmistakable manner. The general impression left on our mind after reading Browning's poems of philosophy is one of optimism and hope. Almost all the Victorian poets had imbibed the despair and melancholy of the Romantic Movement of the early 19th century. Browning was the only Victorian poet who was not influenced by the nostalgia and despair of the Romantic poets. Browning's optimism was thus not conditioned by his age. It was an act of faith and inner conviction with him. "His optimism was not Victorian; no other Victorian poet of any significance was optimistic. The typical Victorian literary man was either a prophet or a worrier or a doubter, and none of these are optimistic type. Browning blew away some of the lilies and

languors that the Romantic Movement had bequeathed to England. There were, however, other Victorian poets who were determined to bring them back."\* It was Browning's efforts in poetry to keep away that melancholy and gloominess which had overshadowed the minds and thoughts of his contemporaries. He was ever hopeful and optimistic of a better order in life and a better world to come, and it is this optimism of Browning that is the crowning glory of his poetry.

Browning took for granted the existence and supremacy of God as the creator and governor of the universe, and was not prepared to doubt the existence of God even for a moment. He considered God as an all pervading Deity, an essence always partially but never wholly revealed in the creative energy of Nature and the aspirations of man. Pauline's lover says: "I saw God everywhere—I felt presence." Paracelsus declares his faith in the Supreme Being which, in fact, is Browning's personal faith about God—

*Thus He dwells in all*

*From life's minute beginnings, at last To man*

and

*God is seen God*

*In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the cloud,*

Browning did not conceive of God as a cruel and tyrannical being unmindful of the lot of the created universe, or a sinister intelligence bent on punishing mankind. He conceived of God as a benignant and sympathetic power helping men in their endeavours if they reposed faith in Him and His mercy :

*God made all the creatures and gave them*

*Our love and our fear*

*We and they are His Children*

*One family here.*

The second principle that Browning took for granted is the immortality of the soul. He could never believe that death brings the end of the divine spark irradiating human life. God is the potter and the soul is the clay. Both of them endure for ever. This faith of the poet is expressed in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

*Fool ! All that is at all,*

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, (Volume II)

*Lasts ever, past recall;*

*Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure*

*Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.*

Every thinker has to answer one significant question—what is the end and aim of life ? For what objective have we been sent to the universe ? Browning squarely faced this question. In *Paracelsus* he dealt with this problem. He considered that the aim of life was to acquire Power, and since the power of knowledge was the mightiest of all powers, one should pursue it with ardour and enthusiasm. But soon he realised that mere love for power, even for the power of knowledge, was not sufficient, unless it was accompanied with Love. Knowledge by itself was arid and barren unless it was joined with the force of Love. As Young puts it “Knowledge, at first (as in Paracelsus) a glorious gift, afterwards lost its glamour in his eyes : so far from conceding that knowledge could serve as a channel to the Divine Mind he came to scorn it and belittle its capacity to deal even with the primary impressions of sense ; such is the drift of those polemical poems, like *La Salsiaz*, of his later years. *But love, which kindles and exalts both power and knowledge, he deems to be the quality by which man touches the infinite, the quality common to God and man.*” Love allied with knowledge and power ought to be the main quest of the human soul. This conviction is set forth in the words—

*Love preceding power,*

*And with much power, always much more love.*

At another place, the poet reiterated his faith in the same doctrine by pointing out—

*O world, as God had made it, all is beauty*

*And knowing this is Love, and Love is duty.*

Browning believed that the world with all its glories and triumphs, its joys and fears, was a fitting place for man's actions and activities. Browning was not an ascetic who shunned the world, nor a cross-grained man to regard the universe as a vale of sorrow and tears, ‘where to think is to be full of sorrow; ‘where beauty cannot hold its lustrous eyes, nor new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.’ He had a genuine interest in the world and human life, which he considered to be real and good. “He thought the world good because he had found so many things

that were good in it—religion, the nation, the family, the social class.”\* In *Fra Lippo Lippi* we are told that

*This world is no blot for us*

*Nor blank, it means intensely and means good.*

Again in the same poem we have another statement, recognising the goodness of the world—

*The world and life's too long too pass for a dream.*

In *Saul*, the poet says—

*How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ*

*All the heart and the soul and the senses for*

*ever in joy.*

Having clearly defined the goal and end of man's life, Browning examined whether it was possible for man to achieve success in the attainment of his ideals. He was confronted directly with the problem of Evil, for every time man strove to realise perfection and complete success in his aspirations, he was baffled and discomfited by the overpowering force of Evil in the world which retarded man's progress. Browning, as a philosophic poet, dealt with the problem of Evil vis-a-vis human life in which he was intensely interested. Browning was never disheartened by the presence and power of evil, but considered it necessary for the progress of man in his life. Evil checked man from attaining perfection and kept him imperfect. It was better that man struggled to achieve perfection but could not attain it, for perfection is stagnation and 'what's come to perfection perishes.' Hence Evil provided the necessary balancing force in life and saved man from reaching perfection. Evil was no doubt man's foe, but it was a foe without whose presence progress could not have been possible. Evil was, therefore, a condition of man's moral life, and his moral progress. Evil was as permanent as Good and it was man's duty to fight and struggle against the forces of evil believing like *Abt Vogler* that

*There shall never be one lost good,*

*What was will live as before*

*The evil is null is nought, is silence implying sound.*

*What was good shall be good, with evil so much good more.*

The presence of evil should not check man from aspiring for higher ideals. Man's ideals should always be higher than his grasp. He should march steadily onwards unmindful of evil keeping his eye on his unattainable ideals. In *Andrea Del Sarto* Browning emphasised the necessity of keeping high ideals in one's life—

*A man's reach must be above his grasp.*

*Else, what is an heaven for ?*

Man must struggle and strive to come as close to the attainment of his ideals as possible. Man was sent for struggle and fight against heavy odds of life rather than for weak-kneed surrender before the majesty of difficulties. The poet inspired his readers to fight and struggle rather than submit and yield :

*Strive and thrive, cry speed, fight on for ever.*

was Browning's message. In *Rubbi Ben Ezra* he gave the advice—

*Youth should strive through acts uncouth*

*Towards making.*

Further in the same poem he gave the exhortation—

*Then, welcome each rebuff*

*That turns earth's smoothness rough,*

*Each sting that bid's nor sit nor stand but go !*

*Be our joys three parts pain,*

*Strive, and hold cheap the strain*

*Learn nor account the pang, dare, never grudge the throe.*

Browning admonished the readers of his poetry to be warriors and fighters, strong and indomitable strugglers, never allowing thoughts of cowardice and cravenness to distract them from their chosen path of heroism and bravery. In the poem *The Statue and the Bust*, he condemned cowardice and reproached the two lovers for their lack of courage and enthusiasm in their love.

At this stage one would like to put the relevant question concerning the utility of a life of struggle, when inspite of man's best efforts one was likely to fail and suffer miseries in life like the heroes of Hardy's novels. Browning had a satisfactory answer to give to those who were scared of failures in their struggle. First, a man was not judged by God by his actual attainments and successful records. Man was judged by God by his aspirations, his noble ideals, and his efforts to achieve success in his life. In



God's view success was not the yardstick to judge a man's earthly life. A man who had failed in a noble struggle was likely to be placed on a higher pedestal in the kingdom of God as compared to the little man who aspired to gain little and succeeded in achieving that little in his life. This faith of the poet was voiced fervently in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

*Not on the vulgar mass  
Called 'work' must sentence pass  
Things done, that took the eye and had the price  
But all, the world's course thumb  
And finger failed to plumb  
So passed in making up the main account,  
All instincts immature  
All purposes unsure  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's account.*

Secondly, failure on the earth was not in any way an object of dismay, for what we fail to achieve in the world, we might succeed in heaven after the end of our journey on the earth :

*And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
For the fulness of the day ?*

Browning believed that on earth we have the 'broken arc,' but in heaven there is 'the perfect round.' Failure need not dishearten us. The Lover in *The Last Ride Together* gives a spirited defence of failure in life—

*Fail I alone in words and deeds ?  
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?  
Look at the end of work contrast  
The petty done, the undone vast.*

Life is a probation. Life follows life. Man's soul is immortal. Death need not terrify us. What man has failed to achieve in this world would be attained by him in the next. That was Browning's faith and hope in *Grammarians' Funeral* where he stated :

*Leave Now to dogs and apes, Man has for ever.*

Such is the optimistic philosophy of Browning. His optimism, as G. K. Chesterton has said, "was not founded on any arguments for optimism, nor on opinions, but on life which was the work of God." "Unlike some spiritual voyagers in our literature, he

never hugged the shore, but sailed for the open, loving the salt sting of the buffeting waves. A courageous soul, and a vigorous and vital comrade for those suffering from spiritual anaemia.”\*

**Q. 12. “Browning inspite of his unquenchable appentency for drama, did better work in his dramatic monologue than in his plays.” (Herford) Discuss.**

Or

**Discuss Browning as a writer of Dramatic Monologue.**

**Ans** Browning was a dramatic poet and during his life-time he produced a number of plays which could not be successfully acted on the stage for in them the thought element was more prominent than action. Browning’s plays are closet plays and can best be enjoyed in the drawing-room. The element of action is wanting in his plays and that is the reason why they could not be successful on the stage. Another reason why Browning could not succeed on the stage was that he let loose the flood of introspection, reminiscence and analysis in his plays. His characters indulged in psychological analysis of their motives with the result that action was submerged in the pale cast of thought and nothing seemed important unless it was transmuted into a philosophical form influencing mind and character

Though Browning could not succeed in presentingactable plays on the stage, yet it cannot be denied that he had the gifts of a dramatist in a marked degree. The dramatic skill of the poet was well represented in the dramatic monologue of which he became the supreme master. The dramatic monologue is an instrument for presenting the incidents in the development of the soul. It was the fitting instrument for the expression of the inner thoughts and motives of his characters. Browning’s end was the revelation of character, of thoughts, motives and the spirit life of man and he thought that this could best be presented directly in the dramatic poem by catching and representing the character in a sort of confessional monologue indulged at some high critical moment of life. Browning gave to the dramatic monologue a new life force which it had not attained in the hands of Tennyson. He

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\* Compton Rickett : A History of English Literature

made it specially his own and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it. In these monologues Browning had the chance as Mrs. Browning hinted in *Aurora Leigh* :

*To outgrow*

*The simulation of the pointed scene,*

*Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight and costume,*

*And take for a noble stage the soul itself,*

*In shifting actions and celestial lights*

*With all its grand orchestral silences*

*To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds.*

Having presented Browning's preference for the dramatic monologue, let us examine some of its salient characteristics. A dramatic monologue is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy in which the speaker gives expression to his thoughts in the presence of a second person with the object of convincing him of his beliefs and convictions. The difference between a soliloquy and a monologue is that whereas in a soliloquy the speaker delivers his own thought without being interrupted and disturbed by any other person, in the dramatic monologue there is always the presence of a second person to whom the thoughts of the speaker are presented, though the second person may not interrupt the main speaker. "Some of the dramatic monologues are in the form of soliloquy," says Allen Brockington, "but the majority are conversational—i. e. there are listeners and the presence of the listeners affects the talk. Often, the remarks of the listeners are indirectly introduced or indicated by the speakers' answers." In *My Last Duchess* the listener is the messenger who has come to the Duke from another state to negotiate about the second marriage. The Duke's talk is carefully calculated to impress the messenger. In *Bishop Blougram's Apology* the listener is a journalist named, Gigadibs, and the apology is an answer to him for his objections against the Bishop's conduct. In *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the listeners are the members of the watch who brought about Lippo's arrest while he was engaged in a nocturnal adventure.

The earlier glimpses of the Dramatic monologue are to be found in *Pauline*. Here the form is *hinted*. It is *disguised* in *Paracelsus* and *developed* in a still *disguised* form in *Sordello*. The real beginning of this form was made in the *Dramatic Lyrics* and

*Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.* Some of the outstanding dramatic monologues of Browning are *My Last Duchess*, *Andrea Del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Pictor Ignotus* and *The Last Ride Together*.

"Browning's dramatic monologues are not written in order to build up an atmosphere of languid sorrow or quiet determination or heavy beauty (like the monologues of Tennyson), but to project with an almost quizzical violence a certain kind of personality, a certain temperament, a way of looking at life, even a moment of history realized in the self-revelation of a type. The method is not impressionistic or symbolic, nor is it really exploratory (T. S. Eliot's monologues, are all three) : these are set pieces in which a fully known character, seen in a clear light, is set sharply before the reader."\*

In his dramatic monologues Browning portrays a wide variety of characters drawn from all classes of life, ranging from crooks, cowards, scholars to musicians, painters, Dukes, murderers, cheats etc. The souls of these characters are brought out in their fullness in these monologues. "With keen, tireless curiosity he brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us, some drawn from history, others imaginary, some good, some bad--all unravelling, thinks to clear-sighted poet, the tangled skein of of their emotions and actions. Browning appears to give them wide scope and let them say what they like but in fact he guides their confidence in the direction of his own philosophy of optimism and freedom, and towards that faith in life, in the spiritual essence and immortality of the soul, which is the basis of his generous optimism."\*\*

These characters of Browning reveal themselves in their monologues and bring out the inner workings of their minds. Cazamian calls these monologues, "studies in practical psychology"; for they reveal a wide variety of characters and provide a peep into their inner life.

The real poetic interest of Browning's monologues lies in the violence and vividness with which he renders the impression of a personality caught unaware. Browning aims continually at

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\* David Daiches; *A Critical History of English Literature* (vol. II).

\*\* Legouis-Cazamian *A Short History of English Literature*

the effect of impromptu. In many of the monologues there is a mingling of the colloquial and the unusual one. The unusual produces an effect of grotesqueness that adds life and humour to the monologue.

The characters in these monologues believe in God and justify their deeds and actions by attributing them to God's will. *Sludge the Medium* is certain that his life of lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to God's commands. Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of compromise has been justified by God's will. Andrea Del Sarto says to his wife :

*At the end*

*God, I conclude, compensates punishes;*

*All is as God over-rules.*

Browning's dramatic monologues are mixtures of halftruths and falsehoods. The characters do not reveal the full truths of their life in their speeches. They half reveal and half conceal truths and falsehoods. The characters do not reveal the full truths the soul within and present their thoughts in a tricky and subtle style.

In the opinion of some critics the dramatic monologues are satires upon their characters because Browning brings out their follies in their speeches. But this is not a just criticism. "The great sophistical monologues which Browning wrote in his later years," says G. K. Chesterton, "are not satires upon their subjects. They are not even harsh or unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences. They say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with whom they deal." *The Last Ride Together* seeks to defend the lover and his follower and *Andrea Del Sarto* provides a defence of the character of the painter.

It is pointed out that Browning's language in these monologues is coarse and brutal. This is only a partial truth for there are many beautiful passages scattered in the monologues.

Browning's philosophy of life is nicely brought out in these monologues. They are also highly suggestive in character and provide enough scope for speculative thinking. To sum up, "These collections of Monologues form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic

literature of the nineteenth century. The defects which prevented his complete success in the regular drama are not apparent in this cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best.”\*

**Q. 13. Write a note on the obscurity and formlessness of Browning's poetry.**

**Ans.** Browning is a difficult poet to understand and the difficulty is intensified by the fact that his poetry is packed with thoughts and is presented in a style that defies analysis and understanding. Browning's poetry appeared obscure, formless and bewildering to the readers of his time and the charge of obscurity is still levelled against the major work of the poet. The publication of *Sordello* created an impression that Browning was an obscure poet; for very few literary men could understand the skein of tangled thought presented in this long poem. The reading public found in this poem a monument of obscurity and diffuseness. Tennyson railed against the obscurity of the poem by making a statement that he only understood two lines of it, the opening line “Who will may hear Sordello's story told,” and the final, “Who has heard Sordello's story told.” Douglas Jarrod, who had taken *Sordello* just to beguile his time after recovery from a prolonged illness soon put down the book in disgust and horror with the remark, “My God! I'm an idiot, My health is restored, but my mind's gone. I can't understand two consecutive lines of an English poem.” All these reactions to *Sordello* clearly indicate that in this work Browning was unintelligible to the majority of his readers. This characteristic of unintelligibility continued to be a feature of his later works as well and by the time the poet wrote the *Ring and the Book*, he became so difficult a poet as many readers left the study of his works in sheer despair.

It is a fact that Browning's poems are obscure and formless. They cannot be easily comprehended if proper attention and care is not given to understand them. Browning himself sometimes could not explain the meaning of some of his own poems after they had been composed by him. Once a student went to the

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\* Hugh Walker—The Victorian Age in Literature.

poet to seek illumination on a certain point presented by him in one of his poems. Browning read the poem but could not clear the difficulty presented by the seeker of knowledge. Quite jocularly Browning replied to the young boy, "When I wrote this poem, two persons knew the meaning of it, God and I, now only one of them (God) knows it."

Let us now analyse and examine the causes responsible for the alleged obscurity found in Browning's poems. Some readers attribute Browning's obscurity to his intellectual vanity. This charge has been ably refuted by G. K. Chesterton who states that there is not an iota of evidence that he was intellectually vain. He was meek and humble, and thought that his ideas were commonplace and could be easily understood by his readers. He thought that "the whole street was humming with his ideas and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself." To Browning his ideas were clear and he thought that his readers would be able to follow them. "He was not unintelligible because he was proud," says G. K. Chesterton, "but unintelligible because he was humble. He was unintelligible because his thoughts were vague but because to him they were obvious."\* The most obvious reason that can be pointed out for Browning's obscurity was the inability of his readers to penetrate through the subtle, deep and philosophical thoughts of the poet. They were fed on the limpid and easy-flowing poetry of Tennyson. To them Browning appeared obscure because there was a plethora of allusions and references in his writings which could not be easily understood by them. The presence of too many allusions and references in Browning's poetry created confusion in the minds of the readers and they failed to understand him in his true spirit.

Browning wrote too much and revised too little. The time which he should have given to making one thought clear was used in expressing other thoughts that fled through his head like a flock of swallows. His thoughts rushed more speedily through his mind than his language could possibly express them. His thoughts were so subtle that language could not give them an adequate expression. He had fancies "that broke through language

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\*G. K. Chesterton : Robert Browning.

and escaped," and could not be caught by the readers.

Browning had the peculiar habit of presenting too much in too little a space. This condensation of thought was extremely baffling to his readers and defied proper analysis and understanding. The average reader could not keep pace with the subtlety of his thoughts.

Added to this bane of condensation and quick thought, was the faulty grammar of the poet. He never bothered about grammar. He followed the policy of suppressing words with the result that many of his lines are elliptical to a fault. He frequently clipped his speech, giving us a series of ejaculations.

F. L. Lucas in the *Ten Victorian Poets* finds fault with Browning's language. He says, "He is indeed one of those writers who treat language not as a musical instrument, needing delicacy no less than power in its handling, but rather as an iron bar which they are to twist and tangle in an exhibition of their prowess as professional strong men."

Browning's style too poses certain difficulties. "He has something to say, something of infinite moment and solemn import but he is comparatively careless how he says it. He is the Carlyle of Poetry, the message is everything, the verbal vesture nothing."

Browning need not terrify us if we approach him in the spirit of humility and devote ourselves to his study. Behind the so-called obscurity there is richness of thought and the reader will be amply repaid if he devotes his time studiously to the study of Browning's philosophical thoughts.

Browning's language is the fitting instrument for his philosophical thoughts. His deep and profound thoughts could not have been fittingly expressed in the language of a love song. The priceless gems lie hidden behind the language that baffles the modern readers. But it cannot be denied that the language in which they have been couched is the proper and befitting vesture for them. After all as Berdoe says, "Precious stones do sometimes want digging for. Diamonds and nuggets are not always to be stumbled across on the footpath. Pickaxes and crushing mills are not unknown in mining operations; and the treasures of kings are kept in strong boxes. The bee cannot gather his honey from the simplest flower without contributing his quota to the process of



fertilisation; [and the stimulation of our thinking faculties is no small part of the good which great teachers have to do for us. The quartz will pay for crushing, the diamond for digging."\*

**Q. 14. Give your estimate of Elizabeth Barret Browning (1806—61) as a poetess of the Victorian Age.**

**Ans.** Elizabeth Barret Browning, the life-partner of Robert Browning, occupies a place of her own among the poets of the Victorian Age. She was a few years older than her husband and had begun composing poems, which were rather old fashioned in form and showed a curious mingling of the influence of the Bible, the Greeks, Byron and Shelley. In her early works, the *Seraphim* (1833), and *Poems* (1844) there is the presence of emotion and romance though both of them are rather over-wrought and lack the ring of genuine feeling. She later on turned with greater success to an imitation of Coleridge in her impressions of the Middle Ages and produced *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* which appears to be the work of an artist saturated in the lore of the Middle Ages. The influence of Tennyson's *Idylls* is clearly noticed in this work.

Mrs. Browning soon realized that she was unnecessarily wasting her time in writing about the Middle Ages when life all around her was rich enough to provide her inspiration for her poetry. She soon turned her gaze to social life and produced *The Cry of Children* which remains a poem of tender pathos and indignation, pathos at the sad and miserable plight of the tender children and indignation at the industrial system which allowed the employment of children in factories. This poem is quite in keeping with the spirit of humanitarianism prevalent during the Victorian Age.

Mrs. Browning's best work is to be found in her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a collection of love sonnets just before she married Browning. These sonnets bring out her love for Browning who found her ill and lonely and cured her with his tender care. The sonnets exhibit the intensity of passion and the rapture of love. In one of the sonnets she mentions the various ways in which she loves Browning—

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\* Bede—Browning's Message to His Time

*How do I love thee ? Let me count the ways.  
 I love thee to the depth and breath and height  
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
 For the end of Being and ideal Grace;  
 I love thee to the level of every day's  
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right.*

.....

*I shall but love the better after death.*

"Good as they are, these sonnets have neither massiveness and subtlety of thought on the one hand, nor melody and charm on the other, sufficient to secure a place beside the greatest poetry. But they are the genuine utterance of a woman's heart, at once humbled and exalted by love, and in this respect they are unique. The woman's passion, from the woman's point of view has seldom found expression at all in literature, and this particular aspect of it never. Hence, while it would be too much to say that these sonnets are, as pieces of poetry, equal to the sonnets of Wordsworth or of Milton, it is not so unreasonable to question whether their removal would not leave a more irreparable gap in literature."\*

Though Mrs. Browning's diction was far from pure and her sense of rhythm uncertain, her sonnets abound in vivid phrases, strong new images, and trenchant brevities. The narrow frame of the sonnet kept her habitual exuberance within bounds and forced her to submit to the discipline of this art form.

Mrs. Browning's next important work is *Aurora Leigh*. It is a fragment of spiritual autobiography and its vitality lies in its intimate revelation of the writer's nature, temperament and outlook. The whole work reads like an epic. It is in fact a kind of domestic and contemporary epic on a romantic theme. It is in blank verse, and Mrs. Browning's blank verse is very unequal. Often in its extreme looseness it comes so close to prose as clearly to be distinguishable from it. Long stretches are dry without any beauty of form, and are besides spoilt by a pedantic wordiness, a sort of inflated utterance and affectation of masculinity. But there are many pages where sentiment and style, alike, are admirable, in

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\* Quoted by Hugh Walker in *Literature of the Victorian Era*.

passages both of irony and of lyrical emotion. Then the verse takes wings and soars with rare ease and with a nervous strength that is characteristic of Mrs. Browning, showing her to be not only original but an equal of the greatest. It is to be regretted that this wide-flung and generously conceived poem could not be sustained to the end by a firmer artistic technique."\*

A few outstanding characteristics of Mrs. Browning's poetry can be gathered from her works discussed above. She is the poetess of humanitarianism and deep pity. Her poems evoke the chords of sympathy in our hearts and bring tears to our eyes. Her *Cowper's Grave* and *The Cry of the Children* are marked with a note of deep pathos. Her love poems are rich in emotion and exhibit the intensity of her passion and love for the poet. Her religious poems are not successful in their efforts to fuse devotional and aesthetic impulses, for she believes that "God Himself is the best poet, and the Real is His Song."

Mrs. Browning's poetry suffers from numerous shortcomings and defects. She is often extravagant and at times hysterical. Her unchecked fluency degenerates into volubility and many of her poems suffer from prolixity and diffuseness. "Her poetry has none of her husband's strength and verbal precision. It is highly emotional, sometimes embarrassingly personal in tone and draws on conventional poetic images and diction."\*\* But with all her faults she is sincere in her utterance and genuine in her feelings. Her poetry places her among the minor poets of the Victorian age.

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**Q. 15. Give a brief account of the main poetical works of Matthew Arnold (1822—1888)**

**Ans.** Matthew Arnold belonged to the group of the reflective, thoughtful and intellectual poets of the Victorian age. His poetical works are not very bulky. As early as 1849 he had published, under the initial of his surname only, *The Strayed Reveller and other Poems*, but this poetical building was not based on a sound and secure foundation. Later on this volume was withdrawn from publication. In 1852 was published *Empedocles on*

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\* Legouis & Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

\*\* David Dalcho : A Critical History of English Literature.

*Etna and other Poems* by "A" containing besides the title piece, *Tristram and Isuelt*, *Faded Leaves*, *The Youth of Nature*, *The Youth of Man*, *Morality*, *A Summer Night*, *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens*, *Switzerland* and other poems. This volume was also withdrawn from publication. Then followed *Poems* in 1853 with a remarkable preface. It was a collection "which was certainly the best that had been produced by any one younger than the two masters already discussed." This volume contained famous poems of Arnold such as *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Scholar Gipsy*. In 1855 was issued *Poems by Matthew Arnold, Second Series* containing many old and published poems and a few new ones such as *Balder Dead* and *Separation*. In 1858 was brought out *Merope* a Greek tragedy. It was in the same line as Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Swinburne's *Atlanta in Calydon*. In 1867 *New Poems* was published. This volume contained *Thyrsis*, *Rugby Chapel*, *Dover Beach*, *A Southern Night*, *Obermann Once More* and others. In 1869 was printed the first edition containing all the important poems of Matthew Arnold.

The poems of Matthew Arnold can broadly be classified into narrative, dramatic, elegiac and lyrical poems, besides a few sonnets which he wrote from time to time.

*Sohrab and Rustum*, *Tristram and Iseult* and *Balder Dead* are the prominent narrative poems of Matthew Arnold. The main elegiac poems are *Thyrsis*, *Rugby Chapel*, *A Southern Night*, *Westminster Abbey* and *Geist's Grave*. To the group of reflective poems belong *Resignation*, *Requiescat*, *The Buried Life*, *Youth and Calm*, *Scholar Gipsy*, *Stanzas—From the Grand Chartreuse* and *Dover Beach*. A few poems like *The Strayed Reveller*, *Mycerinus*, *The Sick King of Bokhara*, *Empedocles at Etna*, are classical in theme and treatment. *Faded Leaves* and *Switzerland* belong to the group of lyrics. *Shakespeare*, *To a Republican Friend*, *Worldly Piece* are Arnold Sonnets. "Next perhaps to the elegies and elegiac lyrics" says Hugh Walker, "Arnold shows best in the sonnets. The severe restraint of the form was hardly necessary to him, but it suited him, and as a sonneteer in the Italian form he ranks with the best in English Literature."

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**Q. 16** Show your acquaintance with the following poems by Matthew Arnold.

(1) *Strayed Reveller* (2) *Mycerinus* (3) *Empedocles at Etna* (4) *Sohrab and Rustum* (5) *Thyrsis* (6) *Rugby Chapel* (7) *Scholar Gipsy* (8) *Dover Beach* (9) *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens* (10) *Shakespeare*.

**Ans. Strayed Reveller.**

This long narrative poem recounts the adventures of a youth given to heady drinks in the palace of Circe, the far-famed enchantress and beguiler of youth by wine. It belongs to the group of classical poems, and is marked with a swiftness of speed. "It glimmers with a golden ray of romantic splendour, sounds like a tale told in dim Eden; appears like a fantasy king in the highest air of enchantment. It is an example of the finest flower of the classical edition on the lyric soil of English poetry."

**Mycerinus.**

This dramatic monologue brings out the story of king Mycerinus of Egypt, who was informed by the Oracle that he would meet his end in six years' time. Mycerinus could not reconcile himself to his fate for he had done no wrong to merit so early a death. He had been a just and good king. To defy the high handed justice of God, he relinquished the throne, and went to the open space of nature where he beguiled his time in merriment and joy. Time fled on with its kid-foot speed, and at last came the time when the king had to go. He resigned himself to the decrees of fate, and met his end with stoic fortitude. The poem ends, not in protest, but in resignation to fate, which is a marked feature of Arnold's classical poems.

**Empedocles at Etna.**

This poem recounts the life of Empedocles, a learned and eloquent philosopher of Sicily about 444 B. C. and his suicide by plunging into the crater of the volcano. He muses on man's mediocré lot and speculates on the course of the soul after death before plunging into the crater. The poem lacks action. "There is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" in this poem, and that is the reason why it was withdrawn from publication.

**Sohrab and Rustum.**

It is an oriental tale recounting in good narrative verse the

pathetic end of Sohrab at the hands of his own father Rustum. The fatalistic note in the poem is well marked out. Its tone of melancholy and destiny is in keeping with the Greek view of life. The Homeric similes constitute the main charm of this epic-fragment. "It combines classic purity of style with romantic ardour of feeling. The truth of its oriental colour, the deep pathos of the situation, the fire and intensity of the action, the strong conception of character, and the full, solemn music of the verse, make *Sohrab and Rustum* unquestionably the masterpiece among Arnold's longer poems."\* Some of the well known lines of this poem are—

*But yet success sways with the breath of Heaven  
For we are all, like swimmers in the sea.  
Pois'd on top of a huge wave of fate  
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.*

#### Thyrsis.

This fine elegy is one of the best of its kind in English poetry. It is a pastoral elegy written on the death of Arthur Clough. It was first published in April 1866. Thyrsis in this poem stands for Clough, and Corydon, mentioned later on, for Arnold. The elegiac tone of the poem is well combined with a critical note, and in this respect it is well in keeping with *Lycidas*. A criticism of Victorian materialism can be clearly noticed in the following lines of the poem :

*A fugitive and gracious li ht he seeks  
Shy to illumine, and I seek it too  
This does not come with house or with gold,  
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew.  
'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold.*

The poem though elegiac in tone and pastoral in its setting, ends on a note of hope—

*Why faintest thou ? I wander' d till I died  
Roam on ! the light we sought is shining still  
Dost thou ask proof ? Our tree yet crowns the hill  
Our scholar travels yet the loved hillside.*

"The theme of the elegy is really Arnold himself, his doubts and problems and introspective melancholy, developed indirectly

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

in an organic context and in association with aspects of the English landscape which are most appropriate to the contemplative mood.”  
**Rugby Chapel.**

This well known elegy, written to the memory of his great father Dr. Thomas Arnold, was published by Arnold in 1867. It is a reverential tribute by a son to his worthy father. Besides eulogising Dr. Arnold for his many virtues of head and heart, Matthew Arnold introduces his reflection on the people of the world, who stand on a far lower level than his father. It was given to Dr. Arnold to save the struggling followers from ruin :

*Therefore to thee it was given  
 Many to save with thyself  
 And, at the end of thy day,  
 O faithful shepherd ! to come  
 Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.*

The generalisations of Arnold tend to obscure the object portrayed. The metre of the poem is uncouth. It is written in unrhymed and freely cadenced verses.

#### **Scholar Gipsy.**

This poem is rightly estimated as one of the finest poems in the English language. It was first published in 1853. The chief source of inspiration for the poem is a passage in the book—*The Vanity of Dogmatizing* by Joseph Glanvil, an English Divine, who lived from, 1636-1680. It recounts the adventures of an Oxford Scholar who tired of seeking preferment, joined the gipsies to learn their lore, roamed in the world with them, and still haunts the Oxford countryside. With this is woven a wonderful evocation of the landscape round about Oxford and a criticism of the materialistic life of the age. The poem represents Arnold's general attitude towards life and is marked with a pessimistic and melancholy tone. Here are a few representative lines from the poem :

*Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven : and we  
 Light half-believers of our casual creeds.  
 Who never deeply felt nor clearly will' d  
 Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,  
 Whose vague resolves never have been fulfilled  
 For whom each year we see*

*Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;  
 Who hesitate and falter life away  
 And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day.  
 Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too ?*

&

*O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,  
 And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;  
 Before this strange disease of modern life.  
 With its sick hurry, its divided aims.  
 Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife.*

#### **Dover Beach.**

This poem was published in 1867. It is a representative poem of Arnold and is typical of his outlook on life. In this poem Arnold gives a pointed expression to the problem of loss of faith in the Victorian age. It is marked with an elegiac note, though it has lyric touch about it. The poem is too 'lucidly sad' to be regarded as a pure lyric. The following are the memorable lines from this poem—

*Ah, Love, let us be true  
 To one another ! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain,  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night—*

#### **Lines Written in Kensington Gardens.**

The poem was first published in 1852, and after certain minor revisions was reprinted in 1867. The poem represents Arnold's love of Nature, and brings out his Wordsworthian faith in the power of nature. In this poem the poet exhibits his "power to draw from idyllic beauty and the common things of earth and sky much that can comfort and exalt man's spirit." The mood of Arnold in this poem is not that of a passionate and pure lover of Nature but, "that of tired man grateful for a present hour of rest and anxious lest the blessed mood depart." The representative lines from this poem are—



*Calm soul of all things ! make it mine  
To feel, amid the city's jar,  
That there abides a peace of thine,  
Man did not make, and cannot mar !*

**Shakespeare :**

This memorable sonnet pays a rich tribute to Shakespeare. This sonnet deserves to be set as an epigraph and introduction to Shakespeare's own work than anything else in the libraries that have been written on him except Dryden's famous sentence."\* The memorable lines of this famous sonnet are :

*Others abide our question—Thou art free !  
We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,  
Out topping knowledge—  
All pains the immortal spirit must endure  
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,  
Find their sole voice in that victorious brow.*

—

**Q. 17.** What are the main characteristics of Matthew Arnold's poetry ? Do you agree with the view of Mary Coleridge that, "Arnold was not a poet but a man who wrote poetry ?"

**Ans.** In the heyday of his glory Arnold was considered more a critic than a poet. "In his verse he is a critic of life—in the abstract; in his prose a critic of life—in the concrete; but a critic always."\*\* A poet who is at heart a critic and whose poetry is 'a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty cannot certainly be placed in the group of poets for whom poetry is a joyful creation, a soul-animating strain, and a spontaneous overflow of powerful thoughts. "Naturally, one who regards poetry as a criticism will write very differently from one who regards poetry as the natural language of the soul. He will write for the head rather than for the heart, and will be cold and critical rather than enthusiastic."† Arnold is a poet who appeals more to the head than to the heart. He was not a born poet like Shelley, whom he criticised as an "ineffectual angel", but a man who wrote poetry

\* George Saintsbury : Nineteenth Century Literature

\*\*Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

† W. J. Long : English Literature.

for it served as a good and helpful medium of expressing his views about life and its problems. Arnold's poetry lacks spontaneity, passion, music, rapture, qualities by which great poetry is judged. His poetry is rich in reflective vein, stoicism, severe austerity, workmanship—qualities which do not entitle a poet to be placed in the rank of poets like Keats, Shelley and Byron. Naturally opinions do not favour Arnold's inclusion in the galaxy of very great poets. "Brought up under the puritanic influence of the Bible and the hardening influence of the classics and possessing a temperament that was stoic and sedate, calm and reserved—Arnold lacked those finer sensibilities which alone are responsible for quickening to birth the rapture of great poetry."

Edith Sitwell dismisses Arnold as "an educated versifier." T. S. Eliot calls him "academic." Lafcadio Hearn speaks of Arnold's poetry as "colourless." Saintsbury is not prepared to accord him a rank higher than Gray. Arthur Quiller Couch says that "he had not the bardic, the architectonic gift." All that is said for Arnold appears to be true, for as a poet, pure and simple, without the lyrical force and fire, and without the rapture and exhilaration that poetry brings, he is to be ranked in the group of reflective and intellectual poets rather than poets for the masses and for the lovers of imagination, music, lyricism and abandon in poetry. Truly it has been said by H. W. Paul "Arnold was never popular and will never be." He will have his readers and admirers but they will belong to the classes rather than the masses. Arnold, in fact, is the poet of the intellectuals and thoughtful persons. He has a place of honour in the eyes of reflective and cultured scholars. His emphasis on lucidity, suavity, serenity, resignation, stoicism, wisdom, introspection, wistful melancholy, classicism, subdued passion, love of nature are appreciated by those, who like him, consider poetry not as a voice of the soul and a cry of the heart, but as an instrument to educate the mind in a right pattern of thought. "Deeper and deeper probes Arnold the sublime beauty of thoughts that wake never to perish." "With an intellectual integrity that tolerates no shams and silliness with a calm-confidence that quails not before the forces of fate and caprice of chance, with divided opinions that know vacillation in the face of

trial and temptations, with an analytical and introspective temperament that weighs and considers rather than subjects itself to the sway of emotions, with a chastened and chastening philosophy that is born of pain and bred up in trouble, Arnold invests his poetry with virtues and significances that appeal to the elemental and universal in man." With these remarks let us examine the main features and characteristics of Matthew Arnold's poetry.

#### **Arnold's Theory of Poetry and Poetical Ideal.**

In the preface to the *Poems* of 1853 Arnold formulated his theory of Poetry and enunciated his poetical ideal in unmistakable words. According to Arnold, the role of the poet is not only to add to the knowledge of man but also to add to their happiness. A poet is the interpreter, the consoler and sustainer of life. To him poetry is "nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth"—To Arnold as to Wordsworth 'poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.'

Regarding the subjects on which Poetry should be written Arnold believed that "the objects of poetry are actions which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections, to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race and which are independent of time." Poetry should have for its treatment noble and excellent actions to be rendered in a noble and dignified language. It is not the language or the style that is of primary significance in Arnold's view. It is the plot, the action of a poem, that is of vital importance for a poet. Arnold did not approve of *Empedocles at Etna*, because there was little action and much talk. He discarded the work, for here 'everything was to be endured and nothing to be done.' The action of a poem in Arnold's view should have *unity* and an *achitectonic* quality. It must be an organic whole in which nothing may hang loosely, but all parts may be subordinated to the organic conception of the poem. The Greeks appealed to Arnold in every way for, "they regarded the whole; we regard the parts. With them, the action predominated over the expression of it; with us, the expression predominated over the action." It is the choice of an excellent action, its treatment as a unity,

in a sustained and dignified style that appealed to Arnold as the befitting job of a poet.

"The noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness. A great poet receives his distinctive character of superiority from his application to his subject of the ideas 'on man, on nature, and on human life, which he has acquired for himself. Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life—to the question: How to live?'"\* The above extract from Arnold's preface to the poems of Wordsworth clearly indicates that in Arnold's conception poetry was co-related to life and the mission of the poet was to teach people how to live well. The poet was not a dreamer of idle dreams and a creature of fanciful imagination living in the ivory-tower of his aesthetic conceptions, but a living being vitally interested in the problems of life. Poetry was a criticism of life, and it was expected of the poet that instead of merely moralising upon life or escaping from it, he would penetrate into life, interpret it and colour it by his imagination. "Not merely interpretation, but the blending of objective life and the poet's imagination is what Arnold means by criticism of life." In Arnold's view, "poetry is not an escape from but into life, and more of life, it is not Lady of Shallot's mirror that cracks the moment it is brought into contact with reality but a king Arthur's *Ex Calibur* that sallies forth in search of adventure."

#### **Arnold's Classicism and Romanticism.**

Arnold's bent of mind was in favour of the Greeks rather than the Romantics of his own country. "It is time for us to Hellenise for we have Hebraised too much," observed Arnold. In his sonnet *To a Friend* he asks the question, "who prop, in these bad days, my mind?", and answers by mentioning three names—Homer, Sophocles and Epictetus, the first two being the poets and the last a moralist. The Greek poets and moralists exercised a deep influence on Arnold's mind and coloured his thoughts and style. He chose Greek subjects for poetic composition and rendered them with that sincerity, lucidity,

clarity, and simplicity which the Greeks adored in their art. *Sohrab and Rustum* is both Homeric in style and manner. *Balder Dead* based on Norse Mythology is also Homeric in style. The style of *Thyrsis* is modelled on Theocritus and Bion. *Merope* is a Greek tragedy. The thought in *Empedocles* is taken from the Greek moralist Epictetus. *The Strayed Reveller* is Greek in theme and treatment. The theme of some of the poems is based on Greek mythology, though Arnold's approach to them may be modern. We may admit with Hugh Walker that, "the whole substance of Arnold's thought is modern," yet it cannot be denied that the poet owed his inspiration to the Greeks, and derived the themes of some of his poems from the Greek masters. Arnold's classicism comes out more in the execution of his poems than in their conception. The Greeks believed in cultivating the qualities of lucidity, clarity, simplicity and directness. They discarded exuberance, richness and decorative expression. They subordinated the parts to the whole. Arnold cultivated these Greek qualities in his poetry. "He is Greek in his insistence that there shall be a definite thought which shall be lucidly expressed."\* Arnold's poems are distinguished by clarity, simplicity, and the restrained emotion of his classical models. "Arnold presents one of the best examples in English of the classical spirit. He is always measured and restrained. He detested haste, half work and disarray. Lucidity, flexibility and sanity were the qualities he specially strove to embody in his work."\*\* "For his ideal of form, Arnold turned usually to the literature of Greece, abjuring romantic wilfulness and vagueness in favour of classical lucidity and restraint when he worked more deliberately in the Greek spirit and manner, his style was often cold and dry. In his long poems especially, he was apt to sacrifice too much to his reverence for classical tradition." "Reticence not rapture, economy not exuberance, harmony not hilarity, definiteness not dreaminess, formality not freedom, lucidity not lavishness are the hellenic traits of Arnold's poetry."

Though there is the preponderance of classical thought and style in Arnold's poetry, yet it cannot be denied that the poet is not absolutely free from the romantic hold of the poets

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\* Hugh Walker: *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*

\*\* Moody-Lovett: *A History of English Literature.*

of the Romantic Age. Keats' influence is clearly perceptible in Arnold's description of Nature. The presence of the romantic spirit can be felt in *The Strayed Reveller*, *Empedocles on Etna*, *The Neckan*, *The Forsaken Merman*, *Marguerite* poems. These poems throb with the inner spirit of Romanticism. The melancholy note in Arnold is in keeping with the romantic tradition. The pensive cast of his thought, now wistful, now bewildered is essentially romantic in origin, Cazamian notices 'inner Romanticism' in Arnold's poetry and makes this observation, "The irony of fate has decreed that Arnold's verse shall continue to be read because of its inner Romanticism which precisely was what the poet sternly tried to repress.\*

#### **Arnold's Poetry as a criticism of Life.**

Arnold believed that poetry is "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." His poetry holds true to this ideal. The prevailing mood of Arnold in all his poems is reflective and critical, and his poetry is "a series of variations on the many sided contemporary conflict between spontaneity and discipline, emotion and reason, faith and scepticism, the rich youth and the dry age of individual and the race." As he believed that what Europe in his generation principally needed was criticism, he gave this criticism in verse as well as in prose. His poetry provides a rich criticism of the poets, the people, and the conditions of his times. In all his deepest poems, in *Thyris* and in the *Scholar Gipsy*, in *Resignation*, in *Obermann* poems, in *A Southern Night*, we hear the poet passing judgment on "the life of his age, the life of his country, the lives of individual men."\*\* Goethe, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley are all examined with keen insight and penetrating vision. In the *Memorial Verses*, Arnold speaks of Goethe, as "the Physician of the Iron age." Byron is hailed as "the thunder's roll" and as "the found of fiery life." Wordsworth's 'healing power' is eulogised. In *The Youth of Nature*, Wordsworth is praised 'as a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world.' In *Stanzas from the Charrteuse*, Shelley is represented as a poet of pain and distress, and how, 'the breeze

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\* Legouis Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era.

carried thy lovely wail away, musical through Italian trees that fringe thy soft blue Spezzian bay.' In *Obermann Once More*, rich tribute is paid to Senancour, the master of Arnold's wandering youth.

Arnold's Poetry critically presents the growing craze of the age for material self and power, for riches and wealth. Arnold's best poetry is conceived "as a battle with worldliness, the worldliness in ourselves, and the worldliness in the world."\* The growing conflict between science and religion, doubt and faith is revealed in the *Scholar Gipsy* ;

*Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven : and we  
Light half believers of casual creeds,  
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly willed.*

The same poem criticises the growing restlessness, and worldliness among the people of the age—

*Before this strange disease of modern life,  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
Its heads over taxed, its palsied hearts was rife.*

The lust for wealth and disdain for truth prevalent in the age is presented in the 21st stanza of *Thyrsis*—

*A fugitive and gracious light he seeks  
Shy to illumine : and I seek it too  
'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold.*

The Scholar Gipsy is advised to run away from the hectic life of the worldly minded people of his age—

*But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly !  
For strong the infection of our mental strife,  
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils rest.*

"The Scholar Gipsy" says Trilling, "is a passionate indictment of the new dictatorship of the never resting intellect over the soul of modern man. It is a threnody for the lives of men switched by modernity, of men who have become in the words of Empedocles, living men no more, nothing but "naked, eternally restless mind."

Being tired of the ugliness, worldliness and the sick hurry and divided aims, the poet seeks to retire to a monastery where he may find peace. In the *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, the

\* H.W Garrod : Poetry and the Criticism of Life. p. 65.

poet feels attracted by the peace of the monastery :

*Oh, hide me in your gloom profound*

*Ye solemn seats of holy pain !*

*Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round*

*Till it passes my soul again.*

He is dissatisfied with the growth of Science. Science has conceived a soulless universe and has been the mother of doubt, distraction and scepticism :

*Most men in a brazen prison live*

*Their lives to some unmeaning task-work give*

*Dreaming of nought beyond, their prison wall.*

Democracy leaves him cold. He is critical of the growing tide of democracy and the power coming to the masses. The degrading and baneful effect of democracy is painfully presented in *Empedocles* :

*Great qualities are trodden down*

*And littleness united*

*Is becoming invincible.*

In the domain of trade and industry Arnold again finds the same tale, for they have brought in wealth, but allowed happiness and health to pass off, and hence seeks the remedy for "this strange disease of modern life" in the happy past, "when wits were fresh and clear, and life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames." Just as the Thames symbolizes the untrobbled life of the past, London "with its ungainly spread and sprawl, its lack of organisation, political or architectural, its undirected expansion, its noise, its 'mud salad' streets, its terrible contrasts of wealth and poverty", epitomises the ugly life of Victorian England. Between the two worlds—one dead, the other powerless to be born—"Arnold finds a wasteland of a Nature, which is undivine, blind, dying, phantom empty, no longer capable of giving laws or direction. This land is full of man's senseless uproar which drowns his pain and confusion. Arnold feels that in such a world which is without God, fundamentally is separated from Nature, there is nothing to bind him to life, and strangely enough, little even to bind him to his fellowmen."

In short, "Blind strivings, wounded feet, confused alarms,



ignorant armies clashing by night, howling senses ebb and flow fatigue and fever, vexed hearts, sick hurry and divided aims, casual creeds, the city's jar, blind uncertainty, unspeakable desires nameless feelings are criticised, judged, condemned." Arnold's letter to his mother in 1869 is the best commentary on what he sought to do in poetry by way of criticism and judgment—"My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century."

#### **Arnold as an Elegiac Poet—His Pessimism and Melancholy**

Arnold is the greatest elegiac poet of the Victorian age "If I had to define Matthew Arnold's place in poetry" says Garrod, "I should be disposed to say of him, quite simply that he is the greatest elegiac poet in our language, not in virtue merely of *Thyrsis* but in virtue of the whole temper of his Muse. His genius was essentially elegiac. His poetry, profoundly melancholy; runs from the world, runs from it, as I think hurt, hurt in some vital part. It believes itself able to sustain life only in the shade."\* The elegiac temper of Arnold is the ruling passion of his life and poetry. "Nothing in Arnold's verse" says Hugh Walker "is more arresting than its elegiac element. It is not too much to say there is no other English poet in whom the elegiac spirit so reigns as it does in him. He found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of mortal destiny."\* Other poets like Milton, Gray, Shelley, Tennyson had given expression to their sorrow in single elegies, but no one else has used the elegiac form so frequently as Arnold.

Not only are Arnold's elegies numerous, but they also constitute his best work in poetry. The elegies of Arnold are in the line of Gray rather than that of Milton or Shelley or Tennyson. Even the personal elegies are marked with a note of general grief. *Thyrsis* is an elegy on his friend Clough; *Rugby Chapel* commemorates the death of his father Dr. Arnold, the Headmaster of Rugby; *A Southern Night* is for his brother, and *Westminster Abbey* is written on the death of Dean Stanley. Each one of these elegies is of a personal character, but "even

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\* H. W. Garrod : *Poetry and Criticism of Life*. Page. 63.

\*\* Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era*.

in these instances of keen personal sorrow the poet widens his view and treats of human destiny, almost as much as Gray does in the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.”\*

Arnold had thus the capacity of writing a formal or traditional elegy and of expressing his elegiac mood in a poem. While *Thyrsis* in the original sense and its companion poem, *The Scholar Gipsy*, in the modern one, are his true elegies, the other elegiac pieces are what Elton calls them, *Associative Poetry* wherein “the ethical and reflective element easily overpowers the elegiac, and which circles round a place, or a person, or both.” Indeed it is the sense of tears in mortal affairs around him or “the heart-break in the heart of things” that prompted Arnold to write these elegiac verses, and he could feel one with Shelley in uttering “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”

Poets learn in suffering, whether personal or imaginative, what they teach in song. “Arnold’s most consistent achievement”, observes Middleton Murry, “was in the kind which we call elegiac. It suited best with his own persistent mood, of restrained grief for the life which he could not accept and the soul which he could not make his own. Moreover, his elegiac poetry was in keeping with a true and living literary tradition.” In *Isolation* “the unplum’d, salt, straining sea”, in *Too Late* “the lovers meet, but meet too late”, have all elegiac ring. “He is the greatest elegiac poet”, says Garrod, “in our language; not in virtue merely of *Thyrsis* but in virtue of the whole temper of his Muse. His genius was essentially elegiac.” Despite the worldly strain in him, “his best poetry stands deliberately aside from the world that it should be so he conceived it to be a condition of its life. The contrast between the superficial life of every day and the buried self of the soul is dominant in his poetry to the degree of tyranny.”

Arnold’s melancholy and pessimism sprang from many causes, the chief of them being, “the contemplation of man’s destiny from the hopeless tangle of his own age, and from the course of the life of mortal men on the earth.” Disappointment in love, deaths of friends and relatives, loss of faith in the age and

\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

above all the melancholy cast of his mind were further responsible for his pessimistic and melancholy outlook on life. This feeling of misery and melancholy throbs practically in every poem of Arnold, and can be traced to the philosophical, religious and social changes brought about by the development of science, utilitarian philosophy in his age, that called for a fresh adjustment of values. To the poet the world was a vale of tears, a place to endure and to suffer. In *Dover Beach* the world is represented as dreary as a desert—

*'Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another, for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new  
Hath really neither joy, nor light, nor love,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night !*

Man's lot in the universe is one of helplessness, hopelessness and despair. Man is lonely and solitary even in a populous world. Again and again the mind of the poet turns to the loneliness of life—

*Yes ! in the sea of life enisled  
With echoing strains between us thrown.  
Dotting the shore-less watery wild  
We mortal millions live alone.*

Nature also suffers from loneliness.

*Alone the sun rises and alone spring the great streams.*

Man's helplessness in the world is emphasised in two lines representing 'the quiet stoicism of a melancholy soul' :

*We cannot kindle when we will  
The fire which in the hearts resides.*

Our destiny is to spend life.

*'In beating where we must not pass  
And seeking what we shall not find.*

In grief and despair man leads his life, without ever experiencing the glow or joy of life. In *Scholar Gipsy* the tragedy and pathos of man's lot in the universe is pathetically presented :

*For whom each year we see*

*Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new  
Who hesitate and falter life away  
And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day.*

In another poem the miserable spectacle of man marching mournfully to the grave is poignantly struck :

*With aching hands and bleeding feet  
We dig deep, lay stone on stone  
We bear the burden and the heat  
Of the long day, and wish it were done.*

In *Rugby Chapel* we get a peep into the general lot of humanity—

*Most men eddy about  
Here there—eat and drink  
Are raised aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,  
Striving blindly, achieving Nothing  
And then they die—perish.*

Man is a puppet in the hand of Destiny or Fate. The overpowering force of fate in human life is represented in *Sohrab and Rustum*, where under the power of fate the father kills his son—

*We are all like swimmers in the sea,  
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate  
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall,  
And whether it will leave us up to land,  
Or whether it will roll us out to the sea,  
Back out to sea, to the waves of death,  
We know not.*

The futility of Love and Ambition in human life is represented in *Tristram and Iseult* where the life of Alexander the Great who died at the age of thirty two, the foolishness of conquering empires and extending one's kingdom is exposed.

Arnold's Melancholy is not altogether sickening or sad. It has a silver lining in its cloud. "His scepticism is not without sunshine; his sadness not without gladness." He himself realised in 1853, "the year of crystallisation of great intellectual changes in Arnold" that what the complaining millions of men want is something to *elevate* and *ennoble* them—not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dream." The poet has thrown hints of his cheering message in a number of poems, although,

"as he progressed he left poetry behind." "The aids to noble life are within", he maintains in one of his poems. In another he says "Task in our hours of insight will'd can be through hours of gloom fulfilled", and signals to a rising, rousing day :

*Despair not thou as I despair'd,  
Nor be cold gloom thy prison :  
Forward the gracious hours have fared,  
And see ! the sun is risen !*

### Arnold's Stoicism

Stoicism, as cultivated by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, laid emphasis on self control, fortitude, resignation and austerity. Arnold's poetry was considerably influenced by the ideals of stoicism. He possessed both the strength and weakness of stoicism—

*All pains the immortal spirit must endure.*

Arnold's stoicism is not of the purest kind. "A wistful yearning 'to make for some impossible shore,' an agitated 'stretching out of his hands for something beyond, found nursing of 'unconquerable hope'—these are there in Arnold's poetry contrary to Stoic philosophy. Moreover, the stern stoic demand for indifference to pain and the fate of men is honoured by Arnold more in its breach than in the observance. "Too sensitive to the troubles and tragedies around him, Arnold broke down into sadness and burst into sobs—for himself and the world. This is not the stoic fashion. Arnold's sadness, therefore, makes him a loss to stoicism, but he becomes a gain to poetry."

### Arnold's Style

Arnold's style is marked with lucidity, restraint and simple grandeur. He is the master of condensed expression. "His verse lacks movement. It is almost statuesque, because each word is deliberately selected, each phrase finely chiselled and set in its place. He is a Greek in the sense he prefers simple and limpid diction. He is classical by reason of the exquisite harmony of tone, the measured fitness, the sweet reasonableness, the Virgilian dignity, the unerring urbanity and the liquid, clearness of style."\*

The poet's fastidious workmanship attracts us. The many

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\* F. L. Lucas : Ten Victorian Poets.

rhythmic felicities, with which his work abounds, please us. A few examples of Arnold's skilled workmanship are given by way of illustration—

*Still nursing the unconquerable hope—*

*Still clutching the inviolabl' shade—*

... ..

*Who saw Life steadily and saw it whole—*

... ..

*All pains the immortal spirit must endure.*

### **Arnold's Drawbacks**

There are certain drawbacks in Arnold's poetry which lower his position among English poets. He lacks spontaneity, rapture, and emotional flights of imagination. "The urge is there to fly, the desire is there to soar, and the flying and soaring too are there to some extent, but the strength of the wings slackens ere long and the pinions flap in vain endeavour. The poetic aerodrome of Arnold is littered with the ruins of broken propellers and battered planes—frustrated pilgrims of the sky of song." Arnold has an uncertain ear for rhythm. The rush and sweep, the swell and surge, the profuse strains of unpremeditated art, the race of unbridled joy, the flow of notes in crystal stream, the bursting gladness of harmonious madness, the roll, the rise, the carol—these forever dear to Apollo, are not there in Arnold's poetry. He has the poet's vision, but not the poet's voice. There is some lack of poetic flame in his poetry. His poetry has "no colour, no warmth, no leap, no passion, no rapture, and hence according to some, fit to be read only by those who have crossed the golden threshold of life and entered the courtyard where leaden-ey'd despairs and pulse-less philosophical consolations sit cheek by jowl, engrossed in mutual admiration."

### **Arnold's Place**

Arnold has certain drawbacks, but they need not detract his worth. He has certain merits and excellences of his own which give him his place of honour among English poets. His suavity, wistfulness and serenity; his intellectualism and philosophical reflections; his sober and serious preoccupation with the problems of life; his chastened stoicism; his calm and accurate descriptions of Nature are sufficient recompense for his drawbacks. We can

sately give him a pretty high and permanent place in the poetic Pantheon.

**Q. 18. Write an essay on Matthew Arnold's Poetry of Nature.**

**Ans.** "Nature of Arnold" says Stopford A. Brooke, "is frequently the nature the modern science has revealed to us, matter in motion, always acting rigidly, according to certain way nature, which, for want of a wiser term, we call laws. For the first time this view of Nature enters into English poetry with Arnold. He sees the loveliness of her doings, but he also sees her terrors and dreadfulness and her relentlessness. But what in his poetry he chiefly sees is the peace of Nature's obedience of law, and the everlasting youth of her unchanging life." Though Arnold lived with his father in the Lake District under the very influence of Wordsworth, his references to Nature lack the warmth and richness that marked the romantic treatment of Nature. "This is presumably due," as Beech says, "to his want of enthusiasm for either science or religion, the two main inspirers of Nature worship. One feels at once, in reading Arnold, that one has reached a period of distinctly more modern than that of Wordsworth; that the poet no longer makes these religious assumptions in regard to the universe which were latent in Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. He is the least transcendental of English poets; and so no German inspiration had come in, as with Emerson and Whitman, to give a new lease of life to Nature."

Arnold's reactions to Nature are according to his varying moods. In his early sonnet *In Harmony with Nature* he says :

*Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends,  
Nature and man can never be fast friends  
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave.*

Again in his another sonnet, *Religious Isolation* he avers that man must learn to play alone his religious game :

*Nature's great law, and law of all men's minds—  
To its own impulse every creature stirs;  
Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers.*

This is the scientific view of Nature in Arnold, according

to which Nature is just moving matter, acting on certain laws, and in concept, "neither good nor evil", and thus a neutral force devoid of any morality and indifferent to human sufferings. The closing lines of *Sohrab and Rustum* wherein :

*The majestic River floated on  
Out of the mist and hum of that low land  
Into the frosty star light, and there moved,  
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste.*

as if no grim human tragedy has occurred by her bank, are a clear illustration of his scientific treatment of nature.

But at other times Arnold maintains the distinction between Nature and man in order to exalt the moral qualities felt in Nature above the restlessness of man. In the following lines the poet reads a moral meaning in Nature and describes Nature not as she actually is but what he imagines her to be. His treatment of her becomes artistic or poetical as he follows the way of Wordsworth :

*Yet Fausta, the mute turf we tread,  
The solemn hills around us read,  
This stream which falls incessantly  
The strange scrawl'd rocks, the lonely sky,  
If I might lend their life a voice,  
Seems to bear rather than rejoice.  
Calm soul of all things : make it mine  
To feel amid the city's jar,  
That there abides a peace of thine  
Man did not make, and cannot mar,  
Blow, ye winds ; lift me with you ;  
I come to the wild ;  
Fold closely, O Nature,  
Thine arms round thy child.*

Yet in *The Youth of Nature* Arnold's approach to and interpretation of Nature is metaphysical and cosmological. Coleridge's dictum that "we receive but what we give, and in our life alone does Nature live", is challenged by Arnold. According to Arnold, Nature does not depend for its life upon the observation and appreciation of man; it exists independently, with a light and glory of its own, with qualities and characteristics of its own :



*Loveliness, Magic, and Grace,  
 They are here—they are set in the world—  
 They abide—and the finest of souls  
 Has not been thrill'd by them all,  
 Nor the dullest been dead to them quite.  
 The poet who sings them may die,  
 But they are immortal, and live,  
 For they are the life of the world.*

“Indeed”, says Stopford A. Brooke again, ‘ Arnold, was not faithful to the scientific view of Nature. His conception of her wavered with his mood. He, sometimes, in a sort of reversion to Wordsworth, speaks of her as a powerful help to him.” Arnold turns to her for the moral lessons she teaches. He contrasts her calm with our turmoil, her rest after action with our hurry, our confusion, and our noise :

*One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee—  
 One lesson that in every wind is blown,  
 One lesson of two duties served in one,  
 Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—  
 Of Toil unsever'd from Tranquillity  
 Of labour, that in still advance outgrows  
 For noisier schemes, accomplished in Repose.  
 Too great far haste, too high for rivalry.  
 Yes, while on earth, a thousand discords ring  
 Man's senseless uproar mingling with his toil,  
 Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,  
 Their glorious tasks in silences perfecting ;  
 Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,  
 Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.*

It is, thus, the one great lesson of tranquil toil, of continuous work as duty that are taught by Nature to Arnold, who in turn describes them to men. But she is very often to him an escape, a refuge from the fever and fret, weariness and waste of life, from “the infection of our mental strife.” In *Self Dependence* he entreats the Sea and the Stars :

*Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,  
 Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.*

Arnold is very intimate with Nature and it is this intimacy

that makes his descriptions of Nature vivid and true. He invests with poetic fancy the Oxford countryside the Alpine Scenery, the Oxus in *Sohrab and Rustum*, and the Thames in *Thyrsis* and mountains and meadows, all receive the magic of poetry in such lines—"Alpine meadows, soft suffused with rain, where thick the crocus blows", and in *Thyrsis*, "Roses that down the alleys shine afar", or "Primroses, orphans of the flower pine." The accuracy of Tennyson has been greatly and fondly praised, but Arnold does not lag him behind in the exactness of observation and at times in the vividness of description. He is accurate not only in respect of flowers, but even of mountains, roads, rivers, and lakes. They are all depicted with precision and exactitude. Here is a lovely picture of the Oxford countryside :

*Screen'd in this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,  
And here till sun-down, Shepherd will be,  
Though the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep  
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see  
Pale blue convolvulus in tendrils creep;  
And air-swept lindens yield  
Their scents, and rustle down their perfumed showers  
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,  
And bower me from the August sun with shade ;  
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.*

Arnold speaks affectionately of birds and flowers, and the swallow, the rook and cuckoo find favour with him. The nightingale receives so much attention that there is one complete poem on her—*Philomela*, "the tawny-throated Wanderer from a Grecian shore", with "eternal passion ! eternal pain." As for flowers the blue convolvulus, the scented poppy, the chestnut flower and the gold-dusted snapdragon, the cowslip and the daffodil, the white and purple fritillaries, the sweet william and blond meadow-sweet, the May flower and the primrose, brighten and perfume Arnold's poetry.

It is generally the quiet and subdued moods, the silences of Nature than her sounds that Arnold's poetry treats of. *Rugby Chapel* begins with "Coldly, sadly descends the autumn evening" and *Sohrab and Rustum* with "the first grey of morning" that "fill'd the east, and the fog rose out of the Oxus stream." It is

rather "mist than brightness, moonlight more than sunlight, twilight more than daylight" that we meet in Arnold's poetry. In *Self Dependence* the sea performs with joy its long-silvered roll. In *The Scholar Gipsy* there are strips of moon-blanch'd green, while in *Dover Beach* the poet finds "the turbid ebb and flow of human misery." In the ebb that meets the moon-blanch'd sand, and in *Tristram and Iseult* the poet speaks of :

*For beyond the sparkling trees  
Of the castle park one sees  
The bare heaths clear as day  
Moor behind moor, far, far away.  
Into the heart of Brittany.*

The rivers like the Thames, the Nile, the Rhone, the Oxus, the Moorshab, the Tejend, and the Helmud are introduced chiefly to form a back-ground to his poems, but the poet endows them at times with a symbolism. The Oxus in *Sohrab and Rustum*, "a foil'd circuitous wanderer", that flows 'through beds of sand and matted rushy isles', and has thus many ups and down prior to its "lang'd-for dash of waves" for "his luminous home in the star-shot Aral Sèa, is symbolic of human destiny in its various stages from the cradle to the crematorium. That is why "Q" justly asks—"Who can think of Arnold's poetry as whole without feeling that Nature is always behind it as a living background?—Whether it be the storm of wind and rain shaking Tintagel, or the sea-laden water-meadows along Thames, or the pine forests on the bank of English garden in June, or Oxus, its mists and fens and "the hushed Chorasman waste."

"Arnold had Wordsworth's calm, but neither his cheerfulness, nor his detachment. Wordsworth lives and thinks with the hills for his sole companions, but Arnold never rests in Nature alone. In place of the steady optimism of Wordsworth we have in Arnold the sense that a destiny; so rarely yielding great results as life of man :

*Though bearable, seems hardly worth  
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth."*

Arnold's attitude towards Nature is of a great variety. He observes her neutrally, for she "sees man control the wind, the wind sweep man away." For him she possesses a gaiety

or cheerfulness but that only intensifies the darkness and despair of man; he finds her fickle and callous, but possessing tranquil toil and persistent labour. He adopts both subjective and objective attitude towards Nature, and if he enjoys on the one hand in "the mighty world of eye and ear" and feels Nature's calm "aimed the city's jar", on the other he maintains that she has her own loveliness, magic, and grace far beyond our reach. But Arnold goes directly to Nature so that he may enter her sanctuary:

*Thus feeling, gazing, let me grow  
Compos'd, refresh'd, ennobled, clear,  
Then willing let my spirit go  
To work or wait elsewhere or here.*

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**Q. 19.** In what way did Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861) James Thomson (1834-1882) and Edward Fitz-Gerald (1809-1883) carry forward the pessimistic note in Victorian poetry ?

**Ans.** A careful study of Victorian poetry brings out several strains, the chief of them being a preoccupation with the sombre and pessimistic view of life. Matthew Arnold stood at the head of pessimistic and elegiac poetry in the Victorian age. The lead given by Arnold in this direction was followed by a number of other Victorian poets, the chief of them being Arthur Hugh Clough, James Thomson, and Edward Fitz-Gerald. They laid greater emphasis on the poetry of reason and paved the way for the intellectualisation of emotional life. "It was the endeavour to *intellectualise* the visions of the imaginative life that led Arnold, Clough, Fitz-Gerald, and James Thomson into that mood of wistful melancholy, that crystallised soon into a more or less pessimistic criticism of life."\*

**Arthur Clough (1819-1861)**

Arthur Clough, the subject of Matthew Arnold's elegy *Thyrsis*, was a representative Victorian poet expressing in his narrative, descriptive, and lyrical verses, the doubts, uncertainties, questionings, and cynicism of the Victorian age. He was, "a half-hewn Matthew Arnold, left lying in the quarry."\*\*

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\* Compton Rickett : A History of English Literature

\*\* F. L. Lucas : Ten Victorian Poets

He was the "truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tendencies, the doubt and struggle towards settled convictions of period in which he lived."\* His entire work in poetry is intellectual in character and is marked with introspective self-analysis and self-delineation. It expresses with great sincerity the spiritual unrest corroding his spirit, and his futile attempt to restore faith and hope in an age of doubt and disillusion.

Clough's first work *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuobst* is a narrative poem in hexameter and deals with the problem of women in Victorian society. It is marked with a humorous fancy, and deals with the vital problem of woman's emancipation in a light flippant tone. It suffers from a certain roughness of artistry.

Clough's second poem *Amours de Voyage* is a representative poem of the age, and exhibits the doubts and uncertainties of the period in which he lived. Its hero Claude is a miniature Hamlet, and his strong resolves are sickled over by the pale cast of thought. The poem stands as a landmark of the age characterised by paralysis of action through doubt, and lack of real purpose brought about by the conflicting claims of religion and science to hold the day in their power.

Clough's *Dipsychus* is a remarkable work in the field of pessimistic and melancholy poetry. It depicts the conflict between science and religion, and throws a flood of light on the doubts and conflicts marring the life of the people of the age. The purpose of *Dipsychus* is "to depict a spirit divided against itself in its battlings with good and evil, pleasure and pain, faith and doubt, and all the most complex problems of life."\*\* The spirit of this poem is carried forward in a number of smaller poems such as *The New Sinai*, *Qui Laborat*, *Orat*, *Easter Day* and *Naples*. We prefer to him in his mood of frank cynicism and religious agnosticism.

*Thou shalt have one God only; who  
Would be at the expense of two ?  
No graven images may be*

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\* Lowell : A. U. Clough.

\*\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

*Worshipped, except the currency*

*Thou shalt not kill; but needst not strive*

*Officiously to keep alive*

*(The Latest Decalogue.)*

"Clough's lyrics of doubt and worry remain more interesting than their intrinsic poetic worth would warrant, for, though he never found a really adequate poetic form for his anxieties and uncertainties, he did speak out about his intellectual predicament to a degree that none of his contemporary poets did."\*

Clough tried to come out of the swirling current of pessimism and uncertainty as can be noticed in his self-comforting and hope-inspiring poem *Say not the struggle nought availeth*, but he could not be successful in his attempt. The overpowering force of despair at the loss of faith could not make him another Robert Browning in the age. He remained a half-hewn Matthew Arnold. "The views of modern life, of its complexity and the paralysis of action it produces, which we find in *Dipsychus*, are also to be found everywhere in the poetry of Arnold. Both are poets of doubt who would fain be poets of faith. Both have to rest content mainly with negations; but notwithstanding the negations, each preaches a gospel of courage and of work."\*\*

#### James Thomson (1834-1882)

James Thomson was a minor poet of the Victorian age. He drifted from middle-class hedonism to nihilistic despair. Thomson's earlier poems, such as *Sunday at Hampstead* and *Sunday up the River*, "show a relish of the humbler pleasures of life expressed in an unpretentious verse form and language which, while using something of the conventional poetic vocabulary of the day, have an appealing brightness and a simplicity." His most famous work in the field of pessimism is *The City of Dreadful Night*. The whole work is saturated with atheistic despair. In varied stanzas and verse forms, the poet presents a despair which is very much different from Tennyson's *Elegy*. The movement of the poem is deliberately lithargic, and its imagery has the stifling effect of a nightmare. The concluding vision of "Melancholia"

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David Daiches: *A Critical History of English Literature, Volume. II*

\* \*\* Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era.*

is the nightmarish vision of a sick Englishman. The late 'Isomnia' achieves a similar mood and there is more of the cumulative effect of despair in this portion than in any other part of the poem. The thesis built by the poet in this poem is that, "Life is a hell and progress an illusion."

#### Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883)

The early years of FitzGerald's life were spent in translating the works of Calderon, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. He made no attempt at literal translation, and added something to the original verse from his store of imagination. By cutting and carving, omitting and adding, he failed to preserve the spirit of the Spanish and Greek dramatists.

FitzGerald's most ambitious work is the translation of the *Rubaiyats* of Omar Khayam, the eleventh century astronomer poet of Persia. The work is his standing title to immortality. FitzGerald tried to keep to the spirit of the original work in his translation, though he varied the theme according to the needs of the Victorian age.

The entire work is marked with a note of pessimism and despair. It lays emphasis on the power of destiny in human life. Its ruling passion is the power of fate that Matthew Arnold had so powerfully brought out in *Sohrab and Rustum*. The moving finger writes and having writ moves on. All our tears and prayers are of no avail for not a line of destined fate can be erased by human efforts. Man has to surrender pitifully to the power of fate. In such a state of life where much has to be endured, the best way out of the stew is to eat, drink, and be merry without caring for the future :

*Unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday*

*Why fret about the n if to day be sweet ?*

In this poem Fitzgerald lays emphasis on hedonism grounded on scepticism. He advocates a life of sensual pleasure with undertones of philosophic searching and echoes of gnostic wisdom. We find in the whole work 'a remarkable texture of sadness and sensuality, of disillusionment and *carpediem*.'

There is an oriental-cum-Victorian atmosphere in poem. "The poem moves with a slow music, the oriental n providing a slightly exotic flavour and at the same time helping

to suggest the urbane sophistication, of Ecclesiastes. A sense of the evanescence of life and fleetness of the passions comes through all the advocacy of wine, women, and song, in an atmosphere of drugged and pleasing melancholy. It is a Tennysonian rose and garden and moonlight, but the oriental atmosphere, the sophisticated questioning of fate, the slow, incantatory march of the quatrains, give the poem a flavour of its own. Yet it is very Victorian both in mood and in poetic apparatus, and akin to the Victorian elegiac mode that we have discussed.”\*

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**Q. 20. Write an essay on Pre-Raphaelite poetry.**

**Ans.** The Pre-Raphaelite movement during the Victorian era was an idealistic reaction against the didacticism, moral fervour, and pre-occupation of poets and novelists with contemporary society. In the reign of Queen Victoria there was a growing tendency to make literature a handmaiden of social reform and an instrument for the propagation of moral and spiritual ideas. Literature became the vehicle of social, political, and moral problems confronting the people of the Victorian age. Ruskin, Carlyle, Dickens were engaged in attacking the evils rampant in the society of their times, and even poets, who ought have cared more for art than propaganda, were not free from the taint of the age.

It was against this preoccupation of poets, prose writers, and novelists with the mundane problems of their times, that a set of high-souled artists formed a group in 1848 called the Pre-Raphaelite Group. The original members of this group or brotherhood, were D. G. Rossetti, Holman Hunt and J. E. Millais, and later it was joined by William Morris and A. C. Swinburne. All the members of this brotherhood were repelled by the sordidness, ugliness, and materialism that had taken hold of the minds of the leading Victorians. They sought to escape from this world of vulgar realities, to a land of beauty, art and loneliness, where they could satisfy their urge for art and creation of beautiful things. All these Pre-Raphaelite poets sought refuge in the romance and mysticism of the Middle Ages, and their

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.



eyes were constantly on the past rather than on the festering sores of their own times.

Originally it was a movement for the regeneration of painting on the models of the early Italian painters. Being dissatisfied with Raphael's loftiness of conception and perfection of technique, they thought of the early Italian painters having simplicity and natural grace. They, in fact, wanted to encourage originality of conception and freshness of execution, which Raphael discouraged. These young painters with a determination to break away from stereotyped traditions in painting set up by Raphael returned to the earlier painters of Italy whose works satisfied them with their freshness and freedom. They identified themselves artistically with the painters before Raphael, the early Florentines e. g. Giotto, Bellini for they found in the work of these artists an individuality and sincerity alien to the art of Raphael's successors. They gave themselves this name because they drew inspiration from Italian painters before Raphael, in whom they found a sweetness, depth, and sincerity of devotional feeling, a self-forgetfulness, and humble adherence to truth, which were absent from the sophisticated art of Raphael and his successors. The movement though originating in the laudable attempt of reviving simplicity, freshness and freedom in painting, soon extended its bounds to include the revival of poetry and sculpture on the same lines. It was joined later on by Morris and Swinburne, and became a full-fledged organisation for the revival of art in its varied aspects. The leaders of the Movement sought to achieve in art and literature what Newman had tried to do in the church. In this way the Pre-Raphaelite Movement supported by Oxford men became the child and heir of the Oxford Movement.

In the sphere of poetry the Pre-Raphaelite poets did remarkable work. Their poetry had certain common characteristics. The poetry of the Pre-Raphaelite poets—Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne—was a revolt and reaction against the conventionality of poetry represented by Tennyson. The poets of this school revolted against the idea of harnessing the use of poetry to the service of social and political problems of the age. Tennyson concentrated on the social, religious and political life of the age.

It was against this age-bound poetry that the Pre-Raphaelites raised their revolt and introduced the new standard of the glorification of art rather than the glorification of the fleeting and temporary values of mundane life.

"The Pre-Raphaelites were above all artists. Art was their religion", says Legouis. They were the votaries of art for art's sake. They had no aim save to burn incense at the altar of art and worship art for its own glory. They had no morality to preach and no reforms to introduce through the medium of their poetry. Love of Beauty was their creed, and if in glorifying beauty they had to be sensuous, they feared not the charges of the moralists and orthodox puritans. They aimed, both in poetry and painting, at perfect form and finish. "A strong conception of scene and situation, precise delineation, lavish imagery and wealth and detail are their distinguishing characteristics."

To escape from the darkness and ugliness of contemporary society, they turned their eyes to the good old days of medievalism, when chivalry and knighthood, adventure and heroism were in the air. Rossetti was the hero of this return-back to medievalism for poetic inspiration. His poems *The Blessed Damozel* and *Sister Helen* are medieval in outlook and form. The symbolism of the Medieval days is well reflected in them. The other members of the school, Hunt and Mallais were a little sceptical of the medieval traditions, but Rossetti had peculiar fascination of the romance, chivalry, superstition, mysticism of the medieval times, and his poetry is rich in recapturing the medieval spirit in poetry. In fact, the Pre-Raphaelite poetry is a continuation of Romantic poetry headed by Coleridge and Keats particularly in the revival and glorification of the Middle Ages.

The Pre-Raphaelites were pictorial artists, and their paintings as well as poems, in fact, were symphonies in colour. Their works appear to be rhythmic pageant of colour. Pictures are drawn with the richness of a painter's brush. Rossetti's poetry is the most poetical of the Raphaelite poets. He felt in pigments. He had the unfaltering touch and the observant eye of a meticulous painter. He even surpassed Keats and Tennyson in pictorial scenes in poetry. The Pre-Raphaelites painted their pictures as in frescoes or mosaic work finishing each portion with elaborate care. "Every

Pre-Raphaelite landscape background" declared Ruskin, "is painted to the last touch in the open air from the thing itself. Every Pre-Raphaelite figure, however studied in expression, is a true portrait of some living person. Every minute accessory is painted in the same manner." The Pre-Raphaelite poets gave special care to the presentation of elaborate and precise details. They painted every blade of grass and every part of human body with scrupulous care and precision. It was this loving lingering over every detail of the body that exposed them to the charge of 'fleshliness' from Robert Buchanan. They could not possibly keep away from elaboration and every picture is marked with the precision of a scientist and a realist. In *The Blessed Damsel*, Rossetti lingers over details and provides an elaborate picture of the lady as 'she cast her arms along the golden barriers and laid her face between her hands.'

Pre-Raphaelite poetry is rich in melody. The free flow of the swift moving lines is remarkable in Swinburne. He is the supreme melodist among the Pre-Raphaelite poets. The flow of musical language in Swinburne is racy and profuse, and with him we seem to be gliding in a river of music and melody. Vowel calls to vowel and consonant to consonant, and these links often seem stronger than the links of thought and imagery. *Atlanta in Calydon* is rich in melody. The ode—*The Hounds of Spring*—has not been surpassed in melody. Each stanza of this ode is a masterpiece of musical harmony. How cunning the differences in speed are rendered in the musical lines—

*The wild wine slips with the weight of its leaves  
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves  
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare  
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.*

Sometimes the Pre-Raphaelite poets sacrificed sense at the altar of sound. This is a standing charge against Swinburne's poetry. Often in Swinburne words and phrases are employed for musical effect without adding to the sense or meaning of the lines.

The poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites is marked by sensuousness. Rossetti's poetry is sensuous and passionate. While Shelley and Browning gave sensuousness to *feeling*, Rossetti gave sensuous

expression to *thought*. "He valued the physical expression, the outward manifestation; not as does the mere sensualist as something disconnected from the inner life, but as the visible sign of the invisible power that moulds life and character into beauty and nobility."

The Pre-Raphaelite poets were considerably influenced in their art by Keats and Tennyson. The movement was a direct and legitimate development of the Romantic Revival. The debt which they owed to their predecessors was amply repaid by leaving behind a rich harvest of poetry for the delight and pleasure of posterity.

Having examined the leading characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite poetry let us now briefly review the special contribution of each one of the Pre-Raphaelite poets to the poetry of this school. The leading spirit of this school of poetry was Dante !Gabriel Rossetti. In his poetry are embodied all the essential characteristics that marked Pre-Raphaelite poetry. The spirit of art finds its best exposition and expression in Rossetti's sonnets and ballads. His cult of love and beauty, his appreciation of colourful pictures rich in sensuous appeal, his artistic portraiture of life in its lovely aspects make him the supreme exponent of art during the nineteenth century. He carried forward the creed of Art for Art's sake in the painting as well as poetry. Rossetti's poetic world is a rare world of mystery, wonder and beauty. It is far removed from the hectic world of sordidness. It is a shadowy world lit by another light than the light of common day. In his poetry we get the flashes and glimpses of that unearthly spirit which haunts Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and that magical touch which is the crowning glory of Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. "The Renaissance of wonder" says Theodore Watts Dunton "culminates in Rossetti's poetry as it culminates in his paintings."

Pictorial paintings formed one of the special charms of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and Rossetti's poems are rich in pictorial suggestiveness. The poet revelled in colours and his outlook on life was that of a painter. He thought and felt in pigments. Only a painter of the first water could have given us lines like these from the *Blessed Damozel*—

*The blessed Damsel : leaned out  
From the gold bar of heaven*

&

*And the souls mounting up to God  
Went by her like thin flames.*

The lines are pictorial, and they could have been composed by no one save a Pre-Raphaelite artist. The deft hand of the artist is again clearly perceptible in *A Last Confession*. It is the story of a murder, and the red colour of blood gleams through the poem from the very start, where the man finds the child on the hills and she tells him how her parents had left her and walked into the "great red light" down to the catastrophe when, "sea and sky were blood and fire and all the day was one red blindness."

The medieval note in Rossetti's poetry is again a prominent note of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. In his works we come across the mysticism, the romance, and the supernaturalism of the Middle Ages. His subtle imagination could spin the gossamer web of glamour and fantasy as can be seen in *My Sister's Sleep*. The supernatural atmosphere of the Middle Ages is vividly caught in *Rose Mary* and the whole poem is rich in the mystical supernaturalism of the Middle Ages. In *Sister Helen*, the power of medieval magic is presented with vigour and force. The fact is that, "Supernatural was an article of his imaginative creed; the conception of it affected him profoundly and he had an almost childlike relish for supernatural situations" (A. C. Benson).

The mystic suggestiveness of Rossetti's poetry is again in line with Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Rossetti had the power of impressing the imagination by lines of splendour and magnificence suggesting some half expressed thought, some dimly shadowed emotion. We come across many suggestive lines of beauty and mysticism in his poetry. The suggestive value of such lines as quoted below is inestimable :

1. *Girt in dark growths, yet glimmering with one star*
2. *Words whose silence wastes and kills.*
3. *The spacious vigil of the stars.*

The sense of vastness and immensity is suggested in several lines of the *Blessed Damsel*. The mystery of life is exquisitely

and yet mystically suggested in the following lines from *The Sea Limits* :

*And all mankind is thus at heart  
Not anything but what thou art  
And Earth, Sea, Man are all in each.*

Rossetti's poetry has been exposed to the charge of voluptuousness and sensuousness bordering on sensuality. Robert Buchanan characterised Rossetti's poetry as belonging to the 'fleshly school of poetry.' In his view Rossetti's luscious pictures and voluptuous scenes were no better than the work of a sensualist. It is a fact that some of the poems of Rossetti such as *Troy Town* and *The House of Life* are not without the taint of fleshliness. But Rossetti did not consider it an evil to present rich and cloying physical pictures, for "the senses were for Rossetti sacramental emblems of the spirit. He valued the physical expression, the outward manifestation not as does the mere sensualist as something disconnected from inner life, but as the visible power that moulds life and character into beauty and nobility."\*

Viewed from this angle the charge of sensuality and fleshliness cannot stand against his works. Rossetti did not glorify senses for their own sake. The body and the soul were united for him, and the spiritual was approached through its bodily manifestation.

"Profound thinkers and more varied singers the last century has given us but Rossetti has expressed, in a way no other poet has done, the hunger of the human heart for love and beauty, the hunger of the human soul for those impalpable mysteries that touch the horizon of human thought."\*\*

Among the little band of followers that clustered round D. G. Rossetti in the earlier part of his career, was William Morris, who signalled his career by writing a number of poems, short and long, in which the aspirations and hopes, longings and wistful gazings of Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were nicely presented. Morris was at heart an artist and remained an artist throughout his life. "The very worst of his writings bears upon it the unmistakable hallmark of the 'artist, the poorest of his

Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

\* A. C. Benson : Rossetti.

singing robes will have some gold feather clinging to it that shows what paradisal floor it lately swept"\* As a poet and an artist in verse, the interest of Morris lay in the past rather than in the sordidness of his own times. His *Guinevere and other Poems*, *Jason* and *Earthly Paradise* reveal his love for the Middle Ages. *The Haystack in the Flood* presents the passionate and savage side of medieval life with truth and power. In *The Life and death of Jason* we have the finest pictures of the Middle Ages in their heroism, supernaturalism, witchery and magic. "Morris turned to the Middle Ages not as a mere aesthetic seeking an enoydne, not as an aesthetic scholar composing skilful exercises but as a child turns to the fairy land."\*\* Morris was equally interested in Scandinavian Sagas and Norse Stories. His *Sigurd the Volsung* is an epic of the old Northern warriors who had defied death and fate.

Morris's love for the past and his disgust with modern times is brought out in *Earthly Paradise*, a collection of twenty four romantic narrative poems in classical or medieval themes. As we go through the poem we are transported to an enchanted region, a world of beautiful illusions, where everything is bathed in the atmosphere of magic, supernaturalism and shadowy unreality. The 'idle singer of an empty day' (Morris) creates for his readers a world of enchantment and beauty, where everything is suffused in the light of witchery and romanticism.

A. C. Swinburne carried forward the tradition of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. His subjects were derived from romanticism, medievalism, and his hatred against conventional morality. Swinburne gave a touch of sensuousness to poetry and the poems included in *Poems and Ballads* (1866) were coloured by sensuous thoughts and expressions in which the Pre-Raphaelite poets found special delight. *The Garden of Proserpine* is marked with sensuousness. "Never since *Venus and Adonis*, *Hero and Leander*, and the *Songs and Sonnets* of Donne had the passion of the senses been presented with such daring frankness as in the *Hymn of Proserpine* and other pieces."† Swinburne's poems broke in upon

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\* F. L. Lucas : Ten Victorian Poets

\*\* Alfred Noyes: William Morris (E. M. L.)

† Grierson and Smith: A Critical History of English Poetry,

Victorian reserve, and his sensuous pictures shook the generation.

Unlike other members of the Pre-Raphaelite group Swinburne was a musician rather than a painter. He made poetry musical rather than pictorial and brought to it the gift of lyricism and melody. He carried the prosody of the Romantic Age to its extreme point of mellifluousness robbing the Hybla bees of their sweetness. "Just as Rossetti made thought pictorially sensuous, Swinburne has made thought musically sensuous. He is not merely melodic—Shelley was gloriously melodic—he is harmonic. Shelley's music is the music of the lute; Swinburne's the music of a full orchestra. His melodies are rich and complex with a sweeping grandeur that no other poet has equalled, much less excelled.\*

The Pre-Raphaelites rendered a distinct service to art by insisting that it is *not* the business of the artist to instruct or to solve social problems. But their complete withdrawal from contemporary life into mere sensuousness and decorative beauty left their experiences and their poetry thin and bodiless. Their aesthetic goals influenced the symbolist poets.

Pre-Raphaelite poetry had its day during the life time of its exponents and practitioners. But as time advanced, charges of decadence began to be brought against this type of poetry and it was asserted that the poets of this school in divorcing themselves from the life around them and in building for themselves an ivory tower of art, beauty and sensuousness were guilty of leading men and women to a world of effeminacy, morbidity and shadowy unreality. It was pointed out that the Pre-Raphaelite movement "was an unfortunate though potent influence," unfortunate in the sense that it exercised an enervating influence on the healthy morality of the Victorians, and potent in the fact that it turned the thoughts and minds of the people of the age from sordidness to beauty, enchantment and loveliness. In spite of all the opposition against the tide of Pre-Raphaeliticism, it could not be completely stemmed; and the rumblings of the movement continued to be heard in the poems, dramas, and fiction of Oscar Wilde. But gradually and gradually the oil that kept the flame of Pre-Raphaeliticism burning was spent, and

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\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.



the whiff of realism and materialism that came in the wake of the twentieth century, blew off the candle of Pre-Raphaeliticism leaving behind the smoke, that too trailed off in thin flakes leaving no trace behind. The early years of the twentieth century sounded the death knell of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and with the coming of Robert Bridges and John Masefield on the poetic stage poetry took a new turn and heralded the birth of a new age.

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**Q. 21. Give an account of the main Poetical works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882).**

**Ans.** Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the main moving figure of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. He started his career as a painter, and soon drifted to poetry. He made his early contributions to the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite periodical *The Germ* (1850) and to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856). These early poems which later on were published in the volume *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881) are noted for their medieval tone, religious mysticism and interest in the works of pictorial artists like Ruskin and Tennyson. Among the poems of this period the *Blessed Damsel* is rightly considered as a representative poem of the great artist. In this poem are brought out his poetic gifts at their best. "Here his gifts are fully displayed : a gift for description of almost uncanny splendour, a brooding and passionate introspection, often of a religious nature, and a verbal beauty as studied and melodious as that of Tennyson-less certain and decisive perhaps, but surpassing that of the older poet in unearthly suggestiveness."\* The poem exercises a fascinating influence on the minds of the readers. "In spite of an occasional false note, it is a finely wrought poem in a mode that is not really either Keatsian or Swinburnian nor truly Dantesque either, for that matter, for the disposition of the emotion is altogether too self-conscious."†

Rossetti produced his remarkable sonnet sequence in *The House of Life*. It is a fine collection of one hundred and one sonnets. Most of the sonnets of this volume are tedious.

\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature

† David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

Individual sonnets, no doubt, exhibit power and passion, but his habit of constantly Platonizing, and equating the physical passion with the vaguely spiritual aspiration is exasperating in the extreme.

Rossetti wrote a few ballads in his life time the chief of them being *Rose Mary*, *Troy Town* and *Sister Helen*. In these ballads he catches the spirit of the Middle Ages, and introduces a touch of mysticism and sensual imagery, fusing the physical and the spiritual in a remarkable manner. His words convey his meaning as ether conveys light.

This poet of mysticism, symbolism and medievalism signalised his career by writing at least one tale of realism as well viz. *Jenny* in two hundred octosyllabic couplets describing the life of a London prostitute in her London lodging and concentrating mainly on her exhausted and wearied out existence.

Rossetti produced a few dramatic monologues in the style of Robert Browning. *A Last Confession* is a fine dramatic monologue in which an Italian patriot makes a confession to a priest how he came to murder the girl he loved. The poem reminds us of Browning's *Porphyria's Lover*.

Rossetti also left behind a few lyrics and narrative poems which exhibit his gifts in a marked degree.

**Q. 22. Give your estimate of D. G. Rossetti as a Poet of the Pre-Raphaelite School.**

**OR.**

**"Rossetti was the nineteenth century spirit of art embodied."**  
(Hugh Walker) Discuss.

**Ans.** D. G. Rossetti was the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry during the Victorian age. He was primarily an artist, and devoted his muse not to the service of social reform and democratic freedom, but to the progress of art and the adoration of beauty. He carried forward the creed of art for art's sake, and instead of making his poetry as an interpretation of the life around him, concentrated on the visualisation of the life of the Middle Ages, bringing in his sweep all that the Middle Ages stood for—passion, love, mysticism, asceticism; symbolism and superstition.

Rossetti was the poet of love and passion *par excellence* combining in a strange manner physical passion with spiritual love. "For Rossetti love is an ecstasy, sensuous and not yet wholly of the senses; at times it has the comprehensiveness of a mystical religion when the loved one seems not as herself alone but as the meaning of all things that are."\* He presented this mystical and spiritual aspect of love in *Blessed Damozel*, bringing out the mystical love between a lover on earth and the blessed Damozel in heaven. In this poem there is the combination of physical passion and spiritual love.

In *Sister Helen* Rossetti concentrated on frustration and disappointment in love. The sonnets in *The House of Life* signalise love in its glory as well as desolation. He combines spiritual and sensuous aspects of love in his sonnets. In describing love he uses Christian symbolism and at the same time a deeply sensual detail to indicate the union of spirit and matter, soul and body. "It was Rossetti's early study of Dante which familiarised him with the symbolising and sacramentalizing aspect of the medieval mind, and his own temperament also encouraged a tendency to identify the concretely physical with the permanently spiritual."\*\*

Sometimes the physical and sensuous side gets the upper hand in his description of love, and then it appears that Rossetti is the poet of the 'fleshly school of poetry,' which Robert Buchanan had coined for denouncing Rossetti's voluptuous and sensuous tendencies. Many poems of Rossetti are no doubt fleshly and have an excess of voluptuousness in them. *The Bride's Prelude*, *The Stream's Secrets*, *Troy Town* are frankly sensuous, and the excess of sensuousness in them makes them sensual. They are overwrought and luscious in their effect.

Why did Rossetti allow sensuality and voluptuousness to come in his poetry? There is a reason for that. The poet did not consider it an evil to present rich and cloying physical pictures; for the senses were for him sacramental emblems of the spirit. "He valued the physical expression, the outward manifestation, not as does the mere sensualist as something disconnected

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\* Grierson and Smith : A Critical History of English Poetry.

\*\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature (Volume II).

from the inner life, but as the visible sign of the invisible power that moulds life and character into beauty and nobility.”\* The body and the soul were united for him, and the spiritual was approached through its bodily manifestation.

Rossetti like Coleridge, was essentially the poet of the Middle Ages. “As a mediaevalist Rossetti is obviously in congenial surroundings for the mingled warp of sensuousness and supersensuousness so characteristic of the Middle Ages suited to a nicety of his peculiar genius.”\*\* In Rossetti’s poems we come across the mysticism, the romance, and the supernaturalism of the Middle Ages. *My Sister’s Sleep* reveals the rich store house of mediaeval romance. The supernatural atmosphere of the Middle Ages is vividly caught in *Rose Mary*. In *Sister Helen* the poem of mediaeval magic is presented with vigour and force. The mystical aspect of supernaturalism, so very common in the Middle Ages, is presented in *Love’s Nocturne* which is Tennysonian in its languid dreaminess. Supernaturalism of any kind had a great hold on Rossetti, and he captured its different shades and forms in his poetry. “Supernaturalism was, so to speak an article of his imaginative creed; the conception of it affected him profoundly, and he had an almost child-like relish for supernatural situations.”†

Rossetti was one of the most successful pictorial artists in poetry and painting. He revelled in colours. He thought and felt in pigments. Only a painter could have given us lines like :

*The blessed Damozel leaned out  
From the golden bar of heaven  
And the souls mounting up to God  
Went by her like thin flames.*

The red colours of blood gleams in the story of murder embodied in *A Last Confession*. It is in this poem that we came across the familiar lines of Rossetti—

*The sea and sky were blood and fire  
And all the day was one red blindness.*

Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature

\*\* E. Elbert : A History of English Literature.

† A. C. Benson : D. G. Rossetti.

Rossetti's poems are rich in symbolism and mystic suggestiveness. He had the power of impressing the imagination by lines of splendour and magnificence suggesting some half-expressed thought, some dimly shadowed emotion. The suggestive value of such lines as—

*Words, whose silence wastes and kills*

&

*The spacious vigil of the stars.*

is really very great.

Rossetti was at heart a mystic, and his mysticism is well brought out in his poem. Sometimes his pictorial mysticism led to mere archaism or mere verbal dissipation, but sometimes it achieved remarkable success as in the inimitable ballad *Sister Helen*. Rossetti had neither the religious mysticism of his sister, nor the spiritual mysticism of Tennyson, but it was "the mysticism of the artist with its fascination for the half-lights, for the undiscovered countries of thought and feeling."

In his style Rossetti was gorgeous and decorative. His early poems are simple and direct in expression, but his later productions after 1870 became decorative and complicated in style. These poems of his later years are full of literary artifice sometimes degenerating into literary trickery.

He had one great defect. He could draw images with a painter's eye, but he sought to reduce everything to an idea or essence. "It is the element of thought and even abstraction, the attempt to reduce everything to an idea or an essence, that is more characteristic of his poetry. Indeed, the chief fault of Rossetti's poetry is its reductiveness. It is this that makes his remarkable sonnet sequence *The House of Life* in the long run tedious."\*

Rossetti may have some defects in his poetry as a thinker but he has all the virtues of an artist. "Profounder-thinkers, and more varied singers the last century has given us, but Rossetti has expressed, in a way no other poet has done, the hunger of the human heart for love and beauty, the hunger of

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

the human soul for those impalpable mysteries that touch the horizon of human thought.”\*

**Q. 23.** Write a note on the poetry of Christina Rossetti (1830—1894), and compare her with her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

**Ans.** Christina Rossetti occupies a distinctive place in mid-Victorian poetry. She belongs to the group of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, and it was her mission as a poetess to keep alive the spirit of simplicity, lucidity and spontaneity which the movement had inspired. She was a Pre-Raphaelite to the backbone and remained so throughout her life. “Her brother and Morris deserted the creed of their youth; Swinburne never really held it; Christina Rossetti, except when she was mesmerised by Tennyson or carried away by her generous admiration for Mrs. Browning, kept the Pre-Raphaelite faith to the last. And she was not only the truest Pre-Raphaelite of them all; within her narrower range she was a better artist in words than any one of them.”\*\*

Though Christina Rossetti lived in the Victorian age, yet her temperament was hardly Victorian, and she did not employ the Victorian poet’s professional tricks in her works. By temperament she was a woman of religious faith, and if she had been born in the seventeenth century, she might have been another Herbert or Crashaw. “She might have done better in the seventeenth century, when her strong religious feeling might have found itself less at odds with the world she lived in and less restrictive of the total personality.”†

Her poetic output is slender, and like that of Coleridge, can be bound in a few volumes. Her major single works are *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881) *Time Flies* (1885) *Verses* (1893) *Sing Song* (1894) *New Poems* published posthumously in (1896). “In *Goblin Market* she uses allegory with an unforced directness that is unusual in post-medieval English Poetry. *The Prince’s Progress*, an allegori-

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Compton Rickett : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Grierson-Smith : A Critical History of English Poetry.

† David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

cal narrative poem more serious in tone and more comprehensive in meaning is somewhat more laboured, but it possesses nevertheless something of the grace that characterise her best poetry. The series of sonnets *Monna Innominata* are of more biographical than poetic interest; all except the final sonnet in the sequence have a certain thinness that is the most conspicuous fault of her weaker poetry."

Christina Rossetti is at heart a religious poetess and her title to immortality lies in her devotional and religious verse. "In the age of steam she remained like some quiet anchoress of the Age of Faith—one who has sat to Giotto or knelt before St. Francis of Assisi."\* On religious themes she wrote with a transparent simplicity of tone and language and a great variety of metrical and melodic effects. Her religious imagination and her steady Anglican piety dominate her poetry. Her lyrical poems, such as *From House to Home*, suggest the religious poetry of the Metaphysicals, and hers is the greatest body of religious verse in English poetry since Herbert, Crashaw and Vaughan. "Her peculiar originality as a religious poet lies in the fact that unlike the majority of religious poets, she is no way concerned with preaching to others or moralising for others, or dealing with the intellectual difficulties that beset faith. She believes and worships. Her entire attitude is that of a worshipper, and in the moods of awe and ecstasy, she certainly has few rivals."\*\*

Christina Rossetti is an ascetic in her attitude towards life. She advocates renunciation of the worldly pleasures, and an abnegation of the sensual joys that entice the soul and bind it to the wheel of the world. But she is not an ascetic of the type of Diogenes who had given up the world and sought to live in a tub. Her asceticism "is not that of the bloodless soul of one in whom love and living are withered up, but of one who has all the capacity for enjoying the sensuous delights of life, yet has *deliberately* put them aside, and turned her gaze skywards, *from choice*."†

\* F. L. Lucas : Ten Victorian Poets.

\*\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

† E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

The world could not hold her in its grip, and she chose to be an ascetic, rather than an epicurean in her life. Her poetry is marked with melancholy and sadness, and the shadow of death constantly haunts her verses. The futility of life and the evanescence of the fleeting glories of the world form the subject matter of many of her poems. Death and shadows and the spirit of *Pulvis et umbra*, mar her verses and add a poignancy to her soulful utterances. Her most touching poems of death, sadness, and grief are *When I am dead, my dearest*, *We buried her among the flowers*, *Too late for love*, *Too late for Joy* and *Dream-land*. Her poetry is one long wail of grief and despair, of the coming premonition of death, and the burden of life hanging on her heart. She gives out the mournful sigh—

*Time flies, hope flags, life piles a wearied wing;  
Death following hard on life gains ground apace.*

Though the recurrent note in Christina Rossetti's poetry is that of sadness and depression, yet her work is not oppressive. There is no morbidity in her spirit. She accepts the sadness of life and lives on without fretting and fuming about her lot. Her poetry does not weigh upon the spirit as do the lines in *The City of Dreadful Night*. "So exquisite is her art, so subtle her sense of beauty, that the insistent minor fascinates us rather than depresses us, and we are distracted from her melancholy matter by her charm of manner, partly also because she does not strive or cry, does not wail or repine, but accepts the pain and sadness of life as she finds it, and though at the opposite pole of thought from Fitzgerald, yet like him expresses in consummate art, her temperament and outlook."\*

There is a note of supernaturalism and love for the Middle Ages in her poetry. This note binds her to her brother D. G. Rossetti and other poets of the Pre-Raphaelite school. Her *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress* are steeped in medievalism and supernaturalism. Like her brother she successfully treated supernaturalism in its fantastic and eerie aspects.

Christina Rossetti had the gift of singing and the lyricism of her verse is delightful. Her lyrical poems exhibit at times a quietly luminous clarity, and a heart touching quality. In her

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\* Compton Rickert : A History of English Literature.



lyricism she achieves a simplicity that came naturally to her, without any effort.

Her style in poetry is simple and direct. "Her style is one of the simplest ever used by an English poet, her brother's often rich to gorgeousness. Hers is pure with the purity of clear spring water, his like a draught compounded by some cunning alchemist charged with all fragrance and flavours."\* Some of her poems for children have delicacy and charm, and delight us by their simplicity, nobility and sincerity of utterance. She is a great minor poetess of the Victorian age.

**Q. 24. Write a note on the poetical works of William Morris. (1834-1896).**

**Ans.** William Morris was one of the greatest Pre-Raphaelite poets of the nineteenth century. His poetry is steeped in medievalism and is mostly narrative in character. *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) is medieval in subject and studiously Pre-Raphaelite in style. The influence of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is clearly perceptible in this work. The difference in the treatment of the same subject by Tennyson and Morris lies in the fact that whereas Tennyson treated King Arthur and Guenevere as Victorian characters, Morris gave them the character of medieval people. In Morris there is nothing of that tone of modernity which characterised Tennyson's art. "But Morris does not present his medieval world as a world of merely languorous beauty, and when he brings forward his sordid traitors and grim avengers he can produce, as in *The Haystack in the Floods* verse narrative of power and even horror."\*\*

*The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) is very much different from the first volume. In this work, covering nearly eighteen books, Morris takes us back to the heroic exploits of Jason in search of the Golden Fleece. Here we pass from the world of the Holy Grail to the world of the Golden Fleece. The treatment of the myth is medieval. It is penned in the same diffuse, soft-coloured gently flowing verse in which the Norman French trouvères had sung the adventures of their knights and paladins. It

\* Hugh Walker: *The Literature of the Victorian Age*.

\*\* David Daiches: *A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II*.

dows with an easy grace. It is the first of a long series of narrative poems which forms the bulk of his contribution to literature. In these he is neither dramatic nor lyrical. He is a narrative artist following in the heels of his master Chaucer, though lacking the discipline and irony of the fourteenth century narrative poet. "Whatever defects the poem may have, it is limpid and pellucid as a brook. Here and there the water runs thin and shallow, but it is not necessarily the less beautiful for that. Its bed is, for the most part, bright with exquisitely coloured pebbles, and occasionally with really precious stones."\*

*The Earthly Paradise* (1870) is a collection of twenty four tales, some in heroic couplets, some in octosyllabic couplets, and some in rhyme royal. All these stories are set in a frame work that takes us away from the world of modern life. In the narrative prologue *The Wanders*, the poet furnishes the background and the framework of the whole book. We are told how a group of fourteenth century "gentlemen and mariners of Norway", come at last after a lifetime of adventures by land and sea, to an island where they come across the last survivors of ancient Greek civilization. Thus the medieval Norse world and the ancient Greek world come in contact with each other and the two groups narrate stories, half of them medieval and half of them Greek. The metre is a delightfully easy, limpid, decasyllabic couplet; the diction has little of the magic of his early lyrics, but is invariably well in accord with the subject. Even if the characters are shadowy, they are at least beautiful and romantic shadows. "The tales themselves are on the whole prolix, the narrative bubbling on without adequate concentration, but the interspersed poems describing the different months of the year and providing an appropriate emotional situation for each are done with an almost Keatsian richness and beauty."\*\* The whole effect of the *Earthly Paradise* is, "that of an immortal palace of art, down whose golden corridors, hung with unchanging tapestries and eternal dreams, perpetually passes a pageant of human pleasures and pains, and fears."† The material

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\* Alfred Noyes : William Morris (E. M. L. Series).

\*\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, (Volume II)

† Alfred Noyes : William Morris (E. M. L. Series).

world vanishes, to be replaced by a vision of beauty composed of joy and sadness; the whole thing is artificial although the setting is that of nature; its contours may be definite enough, but the atmosphere is mysterious and misty. This magic touch of the modern impressionist in Morris sets his tales in a totally different sphere from that of Chaucer.”\*

Morris's next work *Sigurd the Volsung* is Scandinavian in character and is a masterpiece of narrative art. It is the crown of Morris's work. The poem recounts the adventures of Sigurd, the Norse hero. The story of his chivalry and savagery is narrated in the tramping measure invented by Morris for the narration of his vigorous tales. The entire work is composed in a line of six beats in rising rhythms with frequent anapaests and extra mid line syllable.

The later works of Morris were inspired by his socialist faith. The *Pilgrim of Hope* (1885-86) is a modern story of struggle espousing the cause of the people and is told for the most part in the same verse form which Morris had employed in *Sigurd*. *Chant for Socialists* (1885) is socialistic in thought, and two poems of this volume *All for the Cause* and *The March of the Workers* are remarkable for their socialistic thought. The two romances *The Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere* are socialistic in thought, and depict an ideal society based on the principles governing More's *Utopia*.

These poetic works of Morris present him as a Pre-Raphaelite, medievalist, romantic storyteller, lover of the fierce Norse legends, socialist worker and fighter, and a vigorous propagandist for socialism and for the Arts.

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**Q. 25. Give your estimate of William Morris as a Pre-Raphaelite Poet.**

**Ans.** William Morris belonged to the group of the Pre-Raphaelite poets headed by D. G. Rossetti. He was essentially an artist, though in his later works he employed poetry as an instrument for social emancipation and amelioration of the down-trodden classes. He co-related art to life in his later works, particularly in *Poems by the Way*, where he pictured an age of

a Utopia when, "Capitalism shall be abolished, and dignity and freedom return to the lives of the workers, who will inherit an earth beautified by Nature and Art and ask no other paradise." Art for him was, "never a luxurious toy but an ethic, a creed for the betterment of the whole community."\* This conception of Art was developed by Morris at a later stage in his life as a poet. The zeal of the aesthete developed into the fuller passion of a social creed.

The earlier work of Morris reveals him a Pre-Raphaelite poet. "In him Pre-Raphaelitism is coloured by a nature whose instincts are more broadly English than in Rossetti. His imagination fills out the frail forms characteristic of primitive painting; he delights in unfolding broad canvases where languorous effects are bathed in an atmosphere of serenity. He is of the lineage of Spenser not of Keats in his co-mingling of virile strength with the greatest refinement of touch."\*\*

The Pre-Raphaelitism of Morris is best reflected in his love for the Middle Ages and the Scandinavian sagas. He turned to these periods to find relief from the drabness, the ugliness and the greediness of his times. He found solace and relief in them and he cast his gaze to the fairy lore of these romantic periods in world's history. His *Life and Death of Jason* (1867) is medieval in conception and execution, and *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) is Scandinavian in character. He was fascinated by the warlike savagery, violent passion and heroism of the Norse heroes, and he gave fine expression to their militant feelings. He became a romancer of the Middle Ages and the Scandinavian life. The love of adventure and the attraction of an imaginary world, where beautiful human lives bloom out in open nature and unrestricted liberty, led Morris to narrate the lives and deeds of his warlike heroes with gusto and enthusiasm.

Morris is a great narrative poet, and as a teller of tales in a bewitching style there is hardly any poet to be placed by his side except Chaucer and Byron who, of course, were superior to him in the narrative skill. The stories of *Earthly Paradise* reveal Morris as a narrative poet. Morris had the

gift of narration but was deficient in Chaucer's realism and sly humour. His stories give the impression of remoteness from actuality, and create the atmosphere of magic and mystery. The magic touch of the modern impressionist in Morris sets his tales in a totally different sphere from that of Chaucer. He is in fact the "dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time" and "the singer of an empty day."

Morris's poetry reveals him a pictorial artist of a high order. He had the deft skill in painting scenes or rather weaving picturesque scenes in poetry. His works abound in rich descriptions of nature and human life. His landscapes are rich in colour and tonal effect. Like Rossetti, Morris had the artist's passion for beauty, which is best reflected in his English landscapes and the rich tapestried descriptions of his narrative poems. His landscapes are imbued in romantic colours. They all seem to weave themselves into a vast tapestry, an ornamental decoration of artistic beauty, wrought by an imagination that is enthralled by the phantasmogoria of the ages. "The poetry of Morris" says Cazamian, "is for the most part a succession of pictures forming vista of great and seemingly inexhaustible wealth. They are drawn from every point of the human horizon, from the past as from the present; but perhaps mostly from the lands of legendary or mysterious beauty; from the fable and from classical antiquity, above all from the chivalric tales and adventurers of the Middle Ages, for those were the times of his heart's desire, and modern civilization is blotted out in the pictures of the world of to-day, to allow us to see only the fresh green, unchanging countryside."

Morris was a craftsman of a high order. Throughout his life his poetic imagination inspired his craftsmanship and his craftsmanship materially affected his poetry. "Morris's aesthetic delight in the manipulation of his materials, his delight in the Middle Ages as a kind of wonderland, his delight in beautiful fabrics, the thin green gowns that are worn by the Greek girls, the jewels, the precious metals, the colours—all this belongs to a *craft* unknown to Chaucer."\*

Morris's craftsmanship is best exhibited in the manipulation

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\* Alfred Noyes : William Morris (E. M. L. Seires)

of the verbal melodies of his verse. His poetry is rich in harmonious and cadenced song, the variety and suppleness of which is quite in the style of Chaucer and Spenser. He pours out his poetic inspiration in innumerable rhythmic forms with wonderful ease, smoothness and facility. Blank verse and rhymed verse are all united in one absorbing music. There is a fascinating spell in his music which awakens and soothes the pensive yearning of the soul.

"If we deny Morris a seat on Parnassus as a supreme poet, he would claim supremacy, assuredly as a great artist who wrote verse as one of many media for expressing his innate sense of beauty. And if not one of the topmost peaks he certainly belongs to the heights. There is no poet whose work is so uniformly fine in quality, so happy in its level excellence."\*

**Q. 26.** Give an account of the main poetical works of A. C. Swinburne (1837-1907).

**Ans.** Algernon Charles Swinburne "was the spoilt child of the Pre-Raphaelite group, at once its prodigy and its embarrassment." Unlike the other members of the group he was a musician rather than a painter. The poetry of Rossetti and Morris is primarily pictorial, but the poetry of Swinburne is pre-eminently the poetry of a melodist. Swinburne's poetry lacks firm contours and sure outlines. The sonority of the rhymes or of the modulations is that which links the verses together.

All the poetical works of A. C. Swinburne including his dramas are rich in melody. From his youth onwards Swinburne exhibited an unheard of skill in versification, a gift for imitating the most widely differing rhythms, not only those of English poets, but also those of the Latin, French and Greek poets. All his works are extremely mellifluous, and the lines ring in our ears.

The first fruit of his genius in which melody reaches a high watermark is *Atlanta in Calydon*, a tragedy in the classical style. The subject of the tragedy is the hunting of the wild boar in Calydon, the love of Melegar for the maiden huntress Atlanta and his death at the hands of his mother. "The action moves with stately swiftness, in obedience to the strict canons of Greek

\* Compton Rickett : A History of English Literature.

form; the pathos is deep and genuine, and the music especially in the choruses is splendid in range and sweep." Though the tragedy is classical in conception and theme, yet it is saturated with romantic spirit, and in the opinion of Hugh Walker, "it could have been written in an age of romance and by a writer deeply under the influence of the romantic spirit." The lyricism of the odes in *Atlanta in Calydon* particularly the *Hounds of Spring* is enthralling and captivating. "The language is altogether more open-worked than it ever is in Greek tragedy, but the metrical skill and the splendour of passionate suggestiveness so characteristic of Swinburne's best verse help to disguise this from the casual reader. Though Swinburne is working under more self-discipline here than he does in his later poetry, there is already in *Atlanta* that grandiloquent scattering of language which sounds as though it is saying more than it is. The choruses, done in a variety of meters, show Swinburne experimenting in the intoxicated swing which was to be the mark of so much of his later poetry."\*

After *Atlanta* Swinburne penned a few more dramas, the chief of them being *Both Well* (1874) *Mary Stuart* (1881) *Lochner* (1887) and *The Sister* (1892). They are all tragedies. In these plays there is more of sound and speed than action. They are wanting in characterisation and self-restraint. They suffer from diffuseness and over luxuriance of lyricism which are the bane of the dramatist. These tragedies of Swinburne lack the primitive force of the great Elizabethans. They have but few lifelike characters and too many "megaphones" for the author. There are few scenes which make an appeal to the emotions. The scenes cannot be put up on the boards for there is more of ranting than normal action in them. In one of the scenes John Knox is permitted to indulge in a long harangue consisting of four hundred lines. His speech is marked with diffuseness. In fact, diffuseness serves Swinburne ill in the drama. Swinburne met the same fate as Browning in his dramatic productions. Each failed in this literary form though the reasons for their failure as dramatists were different. "Each failed for opposite reasons; Browning because he was too much of the psychologist; Swinburne because he was too little. Browning analysed his creations, when he should have illustrated their characters

in action symthetically; Swinburne rhapsodied about his characters in place of letting them speak for themselves. But in neither case can the literary student afford to neglect the dramas. If Browning's are more interesting intellectually, Swinburne's are richer in fine poetry."\*

Swinburne at once shot into the limelight when his frankly pagan collection of poems was published under the title *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. This volume came like a bombshell into the world of Victorian prudery, and shook the moralists of the age. The violent paganism of the poems broke in upon Victorian reserve, and opened new vistas of sensuous delights for the readers. Sensuality, in these poems, has definite sadomasochistic overtones. Passion has been expressed without reticence. The poems give a fillip to the cult of Venus as opposed to the cult of the 'pale Galilean.' There was an outcry against these poems, and Swinburne was branded as a sensualist. But the poet was hailed by young enthusiasts and hot blooded youths as a pioneer in the new field of youthful poetry. "Admirers went down on their knees in drawing-rooms and adored the poet, while bands of undergraduates linked arm in arm startled the staid streets of university towns with the chanting of those unspeakable stanzas. Swinburne had made his name with a vengeance."\*\*

Swinburne would have produced still greater poems of sensuousness if he had succeeded in his love with Jane Faulkner who was fascinated by the fragile little poet with his red aureole of hair and his birdlike fluttering ways. The jilting attitude of the lady disappointed the poet and he felt no urge to write poems of romanticism and pagan voluptuousness. He expressed the frustration of the moment in the following lines :

*Let us go hence, my songs, she will not hear,  
Let us go hence together without fear,  
Keep silence now, for singing time is over.*

Swinburne's poetic career would have been nipped at this critical period, if his friends had not come to his succour, and invoked his admiration for Mazzini, the Italian patriot. The poet was roused from his supine passivity and started composing



poems of political and patriotic fervour. He abandoned passionate poetry for the poetry of liberty and patriotism, and published the new offshoots of his newly awakened enthusiasm in *Songs before Sunrise* (1871). The poems of this volume represent a turning away from dangerous personal themes to celebrate and encourage the fighters for liberty and political independence in Europe especially Italy. He is never more eloquent in his passion, more orchestral in his music than when singing of Italy and of her struggle for freedom. *Songs before Sunrise* is his central book. "Other books are books. *Songs before Sunrise* is myself" observed Swinburne. It is his central book because besides the lyrics of liberty, he presents his conception of the universe in the poems which may be associated with "Hertha." In the poems of this volume Swinburne cheers the readers by his adoration of liberty and by upholding the ideal which John Stuart Mill had advocated "On Liberty." All the main aspects of Mill's essay are developed in the *Songs*, "admiration of the Greek world; doubt as to the total effect of Christianity on the moral nature of man, hatred of the tyranny of the majority; insistence on the supreme value to the community and to the universe of freely developing individuals, almost mystical faith in the ideal of liberty, liberty of thought, liberty of discussion, liberty of action, liberty for every one, always every where :

*For where Freedom lives not,  
There live no good things."*

There was once again a turn in the tide and in the concluding part of his life Swinburne produced a collection of poems steeped in medieval atmosphere in *Tristram and Other Poems* (1882). The poems of this volume are forceful and vigorous in passion and are presented mostly in the heroic couplet. Swinburne returned to Love, his favourite theme, in two later series of *Poems and Ballads*, those of 1878 and 1889. In the lyrics and ballads of these volumes the early promise is not fulfilled. "Swinburne does not renew himself as Hugo does; he is singing the old themes with an accent which has less intensity, with a rhythm which has less sweetness, less of the dizzy speed of his early days. Old age is no boon to a lyrical poet."\*

The study of these poetical works brings out the prominent qualities of Swinburne's poetry. He was primarily a melodist and for him music of poetry was above all things a consummation devoutly to be wished. "If the function of poetry is to suggest rather than to explore, and to suggest by cadence and image, then Swinburne was truly a poet. He developed to an extreme a tendency that was implicit in the whole romantic tradition. But the poetry of exploration and discovery which is the greatest kind of poetry, was not for him."\*

Q. 27. What are the main characteristics of A. C. Swinburne's poetry ?

OR

"Youthful as Swinburne's poetry essentially is, I believe that a little of the best of it, generations hence, will remain, still, full of youth" (F. L. Lucas) Discuss.

Ans. Swinburne was one of the great poets of the Victorian age. For the last ten years of his life he was currently accepted as the greatest living English poet, though a reaction has set against the poet in our times. T. S. Eliot is in the front rank of those critics who have found Swinburne's and Shelley's lyricism "feeble" "shabby" "repellent." Swinburne has been defended by a number of critics, and his youthful enthusiasm, his lyricism and melody have won the admiration of many readers in our times.

#### A Critic of Victorian Society.

Swinburne was a critic of Victorian society, and the Victorian ideals met sledge hammer blows at his hand. "Of all the great Victorian poets it was he who made the most direct attack upon the idols of his time, upon the sentimental conception of love, upon bourgeois democracy, upon the institutional expressions of the Christian religion. For his daring he has paid heavily : a sulphurous cloud still hangs over his name, his work has always had about it the aroma of heresy, revolt and evil."\*\*

\* David Dalches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.

E. K. Brown : Swinburne : A Centenary Estimate.

### As a Poet of Sensuousness and Love

In the early years of his poetic career Swinburne was essentially the poet of passion and sensuousness. The publication of the *Poems and Ballads* in (1866) established the claim of Swinburne as a poet of sensuousness, and physical passion. "Never since *Venus and Adonis*, *Hero and Leander* and the *Songs and Sonnets* of Donne had the passion of the senses been presented with such daring frankness; and little dramatic disguise as in the *Hymn of Proserpine* and other pieces."\* The following lines from *The Hymn of Proserpine* are frankly sensuous :

*Her languid lips are sweeter  
Than love's who fears to greet her  
To men that mix and meet her  
From many times and lands.*

The sensualism of the first volume of *Poems and Ballads* established the cult of Venus worship, and was a step onwards in the creed of naturalism.

Swinburne composed a number of poems dealing with the subject of love. He is the poet of passion and love, though many modern critics have not considered him a great poet of love. It is pointed out that Swinburne's love poems are extremely sadistic in tone; and of love he knows 'only one mood'—the mood of despair and rejection. He associates the emotion of love with the infliction of pain in such poems as *Anactoria*, *Felise*, *Faustine* and the famous *Dolores*. But this criticism of Swinburne's love poetry is not very correct, for there are many love poems in which the mood is not one of despair and saddism but triumph. *The Triumph of Time* in spite of the note of sadness for the cruel attitude of Jane Faulker, is "a supremely effective expression of a mood of love which is utterly remote from the ecstasies over *Dolores* and her strange sisterhood : the mood is one that Yeats and Housman have both expressed." *The Year of the Rose* is again written in a different key than *Dolores*. "Summarily stated the truth is that Swinburne was the first poet to sing one perverted form of love, but was not by his peculiarity incapacitated

\* Grierson and Smith : A Critical History of English Poetry.

from singing other forms with a power not inferior to that of the great love-poets of the age."\*

#### As a Poet of Liberty ✓

A change came in Swinburne's life after the *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, and the transformation was brought about by the cold rejection of his love by Jane Faulkner and the turning of the tide by his friend and philosopher Jowett in favour of Italy and Mazzini, the great Italian patriot. Swinburne's next venture in poetry was in quite a different direction. His *Songs before Sunrise* are not songs of passion and love, but songs of liberty, freedom, and patriotism. Swinburne is the poet of liberty *par excellence*, and his political poems are a poetic translation of the creed of liberty advocated by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. Swinburne defended the Italian fighters of freedom against Austrian tyranny and roused their enthusiasm by such lines as—

*For where Freedom lives not, there live no good things.*

He rebelled like Shelley against tyranny and oppression, and became a poet of revolt. He bitterly attacked Austria and Russia for their attempt to trample Hungarian struggle for freedom. In the sonnet *To Louis Kossuth* (1877), the Hungarian patriot is Swinburne's meed of praise. His ode *On Russia*, and his sonnets on the *Launch of the Livadia* are extremely effective in tone, and condemn tyrants and oppressors in a fierce language.

#### As a Poet of Patriotism and Jingoism

To the spirit of the *Songs* the later political poetry of Swinburne appears to be in irreconcilable contrast. From a revolutionary idealist he turned into a narrow nationalist, almost a jingo. Some of the poems of Swinburne are extremely patriotic and jingoistic in tone. In *The White Czar*, he attacks Russian imperialism and denounces the Czar in a scornful manner:

*Thou set thy foot where England used to stand*

*Thou' reach thy rod forth over Indian land.*

Many poems of Swinburne are highly patriotic in tone, and exhibit love for his country. He celebrated the first

Jubilee of Queen Victoria in *The Commonweal*. *The Armada* which follows *The Commonweal* in the third series of *Poems and Ballads* recounts the heroism and bravery of British soldiers and sailors during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. He speaks proudly of the days when England held supreme sway over the watery sea and the sea of song which had been extended by the poetic output of the Elizabethan singers :

*More than that sovereign lordship of the sea  
Bequeathed to Cromwell from Elizabeth  
More than all [deeds wrought of thy strong right hand,  
This praise keeps most thy fame's memorial strong,  
That thou wast head of all these streams of song,  
And time bows down to thee as Shakespeare's land.*

**As a poet of the Middle Ages.**

The note of medievalism sounded by the Pre-Raphaelite poets is also heard in the poetry of Swinburne particularly in *Tristram of Lyonesse*. His medievalism is very much different from that of Morris and Rossetti. He had no love for the catholicism and mysticism of the Middle Ages, and he did not seek to catch the spirit of religious piety prevalent in those days. "He was in sympathy with the mediaevalism of the sinner Villon, rather than with that which celebrates saints and martyrs and Madonnas. He could admire but it would never have been his impulse to write *The Blessed Domozel*."\* His poems leave the impression of remoteness of actuality. W. R. Rutland suggests "that Swinburne is as remote as the Elizabethans; he belongs to the past, as unquestionably as Hardy belongs to the present."

**As a Poet of Childhood**

Swinburne had a great love for children and many of his poems deal with child life, with a note of sympathy genuine understanding. His well known poems of child life are *Children, A Child's Laughter, A Child's Sleep, Cradle Songs*. He takes his place among the child poets of England, though he failed to catch the mystical glimpses of child life which Blake and Wordsworth had caught in their poems. Swinburne could write of the simple joys and innocence of child life without any mystification :

*Baby, baby dear  
Earth and heaven are near  
Now, for heaven is here.*

### **as a Poet of Nature and the Sea.**

Swinburne loved nature and particularly the sea. He had an unerring eye for the beauties of Nature, though he could not be a great pictorial artist in the presentation of the landscapes like Tennyson. *The Four Songs of Four Seasons* bear witness to his love for Nature. *The Hounds of Spring* represents his love for the sights and scenes of the spring season. The following lines from this ode to the loveliness of spring represent Swinburne's love for nature in its vernal beauty :

*The full streams feed on flower of rushes  
Ripe grass trammel a travelling foot,  
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes  
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit  
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,  
And the oat is heard above the lyre,  
And the hooped heel of a satyr crushes  
The chestnut husk at the chestnut root.*

Swinburne's love for the sea is very much alike that of Kipling and Masefield in our times. His love of the sea is reflected in *In the Water*, *On the Verge*, *In the Salt Marshes* and *The Triumph of Time*. The sea could move him to strange transports of joy. Here are a few lines which represent his love for the sea and the storm :

*The sea is awake, and the sound of the  
Song of the joy of her waking is rolled,  
From afar to the star that recedes, from anear  
To the wastes of the wide wide shore*

&

*I shall sleep and move with the moving ships  
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide  
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips  
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside.*

### **Swinburne's Melody and Lyricism**

If there is anything in Swinburne's poetry it is melody and lyricism. He carried the prosody of the Romantic age to its

extreme point of mellifluousness robbing the Hybla bees of their sweetness. "Just as Rossetti made thought pictorially sensuous, Swinburne has made thought musically sensuous. He is not merely melodic—Shelley was gloriously melodic—he is harmonic. Shelley's music is the music of the lute; Swinburne's the music of a full orchestra. His melodies are rich and complex, with a sweeping grandeur that no other poet has equalled, much less excelled. Swinburne's verse may be likened to an orchestral concert with solos : we recognise both the melodious sweetness and quality of differing instruments; and the concerted harmonies of all playing together."\*

Swinburne set great store by music and emphasised the necessity of the singing element in poetry. In his opinion a poet who lacked the power of singing was not worthy to be recognised a great poet. Thought is certainly necessary for poetry, but greater than thought, Swinburne paid attention to the power to sing. In a letter to E. C. Stedman in 1875 he expressed his conception of a great poet. He wrote: "The thing more necessary than august meditation and patriotic feeling is the pulse, the fire, the passion of music—the quality of a singer, not of a solitary philosopher, or a patriotic orator." However, Swinburne did not believe that the power to sing is the whole of poetry. He laid emphasis on nobility of substance and intensity of emotion, but more than these he emphasised the power to sing.

He had a great admiration for those who were great singers and also great prophets. He admired Marlowe, Shelley, Hugo, and Shakespeare because in them, thought and music were harmoniously combined. The prophets whose song was wheezy and harsh could make no appeal to him. He valued highly his own power of song. At a conversation at Jowett's tea-table he made the remark when he was asked who among the English poets had the best ear. "Shakespeare, without doubt; then Milton; then Shelley; then I do not know what other people would do, but I should put myself." Indeed, unless one will give to Spenser the fourth place, the choice of Swinburne being the forth singer in verse is beyond dispute. From the lines of the first Chorus in his first great poem, *Atlanta in Calydon*, to his *England : An Ode*,

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\* Geyton, R. cket : A History of English Literature.

he remained a musician in verse, and a lyrist of a high order. The sonority of the rhymes or of the modulations is that which links his verses together. Vowels call to vowels and consonants, to consonants and these links often seem stronger than the links of thought and imagery. He had a full command of rhythm and versification, and employed the English metre in his own way, and in his own style. To many his rhythm and song seemed monotonous, and to others diffuse. They brought the charge of diffuseness against the poet in his very face but he never bothered about it. Relying on sound rather than on concrete imagery, he protracted his poems till they became irresistible incantations and finally lulled the reader into a condition in which he received the emotional effect according to the poet's desire.

The lyrics of Swinburne have little structural design. We can take out verses from his poems without affecting their general impression. A single stanza could be abstracted at almost any point from *Hertha*, *Faustine*, or *Dolores*, and the poems would suffer very little damage. There is a general diffuseness in his lyrics. They lure us by their sound and fail to create a concrete picture. The imagery is clouded by the fuzz of words. But the lyrical charm of the poems is not lost.

"Swinburne's claims to greatness rest upon his lyrics and lyrical passages in his narratives and tragedies. His lyricism expresses itself without much assistance from two qualities which, in English poetry at least, usually characterize the masters of the lyric—firm composition, and distinct, vivid imagery. Shelley, too, lacks these qualities, if not altogether, certainly in very large part. In compensation Swinburne and Shelley offer luxuriant song and vehement thought. Swinburne's thought, like Shelley's is that of a revolutionary idealist; it is without hesitations or nuances; it is simple, bold, and passionate, and to those who are out of tune with revolutionary idealism it seems superficial, ignorant, and appropriate to lands beyond the moon. Swinburne's ideas are intellectually respectable: such doctrines as the unity of man with nature, the dignity of humanity, the supreme value of liberty, are not easily dismissed as feeble or shabby. They are topical doctrines of John Stuart Mill; and if some one chooses to say that Mill is no longer intellectually respectable, I throw up



my hands, and am content to leave Swinburne, as thinker in his company. Appropriately, Swinburne's revolutionary idealism is clothed in verse which moves as swiftly as the wings of thought, which stirs a tumult of feelings so great that the reader is eager to relieve an overburdened spirit by violent action. At his best, between Swinburne's thought and his art there is perfect harmony: a multiplicity of straining, intense particles are caught and held in a strange unity. The effect produced is not complex or fine but it is strong; and even those who resent its furious strength cannot, if they expose themselves to it, resist its impact."\*

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**Q. 28.** What contribution was made to Victorian poetry by Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), Francis Thompson (1859-1907), George Meredith (1828-1909) and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Coventry Patmore (1823-1896).

Coventry Patmore was among the minor poets of the Victorian Age. "Despite his many rhythmic felicities, and his undoubted technical skill, his excessive fluency, and frequent banalities, seem to the present writers to exclude Patmore from the front rank."\*\*

It was one of the characteristic features of Patmore that he combined spiritual love with physical love. He considered the physical as the manifestation of the spiritual love. Housman was not satisfied with this mixture and made the remark, "I should say as little as possible about this nasty mixture of piety and concupiscence."

The earliest work of Coventry Patmore was *Angel in the House*. Here he presents the story of a true love ending in marriage. Felix, the lover earns F 600 a year, while Honoria, the Dean's daughter, whom he marries has F 300 and more in prospect. They were true lovers and were happily married at the end. Patmore glorifies married love. The value of this work does not lie so much in the story, but in its sprightliness. "The Angel in the House lives by its Preludes, with their intimate analysis

\* E. K. Brown : Swinburne : A Centenary Estimate.

\*\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

of a lover's moods, their epigrams sometimes trite, but always polished, and their occasional felicities of phrase and profundities of feeling."\* In this work we have fine lyrics like Greek choruses interspersed between the Cantos, and they add to the real charm of the long poem by which Patmore sought to eclipse Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

"The quiet confidence with which Patmore marshals his quatrains, the steady—one might almost say obstinate—charting of the course of upper-middle-class love running smoothly to happy marriage, produce a poem sequence of intermittent charm, there are languors and fatuities, but there is also a restrained and precise recording of moods, scenes, and situations that shows a new and successful kind of domestic poetry. To be fresh and natural was a Pre-Raphaelite idea, and *The Angel in the House*, for all its total lack of the medieval properties and of the symbolic objects which we associate with Pre-Raphaeliticism is Pre-Raphaelite in this sense."

*The Victories of Love* is a sequel to *The Angel*. Patmore takes the fate of Honoria's rejected lover and his subsequent marriage with another woman as the theme of this poem. The pathos of this poem is touching particularly when the death of the lady who married the rejected lover of Honoria of the *Angel* is presented by the poet. *Amelia* is the third love poem of Patmore. It tells us 'how an elderly lover took his young betrothed to see her dead rival's grave—a situation inviting mockery, but treated by Patmore with disarming innocence.'

In 1877 was published *The Unknown Eros*, a collection of Nature poems and satirical odes. He might have done better as a writer of satirical verse, if he had devoted his energy to this side rather than to the treatment of his "angelic" themes. But Patmore's preoccupation was with love, and he set out to present the glorification of sex believing—"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created. He him; male and female created. He them." His key to life whether on earth or in Heaven is sex :

*In the arithmetic of life*

*The smallest unit is a pair.*

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\* Grierson and Smith : A Critical History of English Poetry.

"In his later work he attempts sometimes the ecstasies of Crashaw, but his ardours are not poetically realised in spite of metrical ingenuities and Pindaric structures; the best of his later poems are descriptive of natural scenery or short projections of a single emotional situation in a domestic context, as in the well known little lyric *The Toys*. Essentially Patmore is not a poet of ecstatic feeling or introspective subtlety; he is the poet of genteel sensibility, which at his best he renders with moving conviction."\* "Patmore remains a classic, if a minor classic, of the Mid-Victorian Age".

#### Francis Thompson (1859-1907)

Like Coleridge, Thompson was addicted to opium. His first volume of *Poems* was published in 1893. It was followed by *Sister Songs* in 1895. Thompson was essentially a religious poet and he will be remembered by his *Hound of Heaven*, where in a flamboyant style, he narrates how man seeks to elude God though the Almighty is after his well being. The imaginative daring and sonorous beauty of this magnificent poem dazzles us. He is one with Christina Rossetti in the sphere of devotional poetry. No writer has excelled him in the presentation of Catholic philosophy and pietism. His *In No Strange Land* is a typical catholic poem representing his faith that Christ can be seen walking on the waters of Thames, if we have faith as the ruling passion of our life.

"Francis Thompson may be called a child of the early seventeenth century. Like the group of poets which included Vaughan and Crashaw he made religion the major subject of his verse, and like them he wrote of the themes of divine and human love, of birth and death sometimes with the intimate simplicity of a child, and again with the strange and ardent subtlety of the philosopher. And like them he brought to the expression of these mysteries profound intellectual concepts and a language new to the uses of poetry."

#### George Meredith (1828-1909).

Meredith, the novelist, was equally a poet of great calibre. All Meredith's poems can be designated with one significant title *A Reading of Earth*. He was an intellectual who accepted

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

Darwin's theory of Natural Selection and applied it to his novels and poems. He interpreted modern life and modern love in the light of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. "

Meredith believed in struggle and lived according to Nature's dictates. Nature's purpose was the betterment of the race, and her work of rejuvenation could be possible only when man tried to rise above the merely physical passion. Meredith was of the view that "true marriage, marriage that promises fair offspring, is the marriage of minds, not a union brought about by mere passion crying

*As the birds do, so do we,*

*Bill our mate and choose our tree.*

Meredith presented tragedy of love brought about by passion in several of his poems. In his famous poem *Moder. Love* he shadows forth the inner tragedy of his own first marriage the union of two high-spirited, highly civilized beings, who do not grow together in love and understanding, but drift apart, yet hanker still for the dead days of youthful passion." It is the exaltation of mere physical passion in love that brings tragedy in life. Frustrated passion is the theme of most of the *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life*. In Meredith 'the head outgrew the heart' and tragedy sprang from the heart.

In *Anewinis Harp and Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History* Meredith presented the struggle for life between Nations.

"Meredith was a master of metre and rhythm. *Phaethon* is a daring experiment in the rarest of classical metres, the Gallambie, aiming, not without success, at an effect of precipitate speed."

(Grierson & Smith).

**Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)**

"Hardy did not simply make poetry out of life ; he made life into poetry" observes F. L. Lucas in *Ten Victorian Poets*, and there is much truth in the statement. The poetry of Hardy is intimately related to the realities of life and is a truthful and sincere expression of what he had actually felt, seen, and experienced in his life. "Much poetry is merely daydreaming made immortal by the magic power of words. But with Hardy it is different. It is not a dream that he seems to bring before us ;

but a vision not some vista remote from the reality we live in, but a vision of that reality more vivid than our own."\* Hardy cared more for truth than beauty, and to him creation of mere beauty did not appear to be a poet's job. "There are poets like Tennyson who think of Beauty before Truth ; they tend to produce poetry that is perfect rather than great" says F. L. Lucas, "and there are poets like Hardy who have a feeling for Truth even before Beauty ; these tend to produce poetry that is great rather than perfect." Hardy emphasised Truth and the motto of his entire work can be gathered from the last two lines of the following stanza :

*Between us now and here  
Two thrown together  
Let there be truth at last  
Even if despair.*

Hardy's poetry is sad in its truthful representation of life. The poet saw misery and grief writ large on the screen of social life, and he presented the picture of human life with as great a fidelity as he had perceived it. He could not believe in Browning's complacent optimism. "Funny man, Browning" said Hardy, "all that optimism ! He must have put it in to please the public. He could not have believed it." Hardy was temperamentally incapable of seeing any justification for life's optimism. He was haunted by a sense of the transience of life and presented gloomy pictures of human destiny under the iron heel of fleeting time.

He could not hold out any hope in a world where God was not in his heaven and everything depended on the freak of a chance spoiling human life.

If *Truthfulness* is one feature of Hardy's poetry, *compassion* is another. "Without that, the bitter truth in his pages might seem too bitter, the irony too sardonic ; but that pity which he found so wanting in the universe crowns his own work with perfect things like *Jess's Lament*." His poems ring with genuine sympathy for his men and women.

Hardy wrote a number of love-poems. They are the most intense and impassioned part of his work. Their range is wide and they deal with a variety of aspects. Problems arising out of

unhappy marriages, children born out of wedlock, the woman with 'a past', and her relations with her husband, modern problems of love have been presented in his poems. The *Flirt's Tragedy*, *A Sunday Morning Tragedy*, *The Mock Wife*, *The New Comer's Wife* are some of his love poems ending on a note of tragedy.

Hardy's poems on Nature are a significant part of his poetry. He failed to see everything good or wise in Nature. To a realist like Hardy the crass cruelty of Nature was not something to be easily passed over in a poetic way. "For Wordsworth Nature could do no wrong" says F. L. Lucas; "for Hardy all her beauty could not hide her witless cruelty." Hardy said, "Nature is radiantly beautiful—let us feast our eyes; but she is also a blind fiend—let us face that too."

Hardy's lyrics are without that rapture and abandon which we expect to find in good lyrics. At best his lyrics have the coldness of Arnold's lyrics. His lyrics lack flexibility and spontaneity. In fact, he is even less of a singer than Meredith. "Line is added to line in a determined pattern, but the lines only on rare occasions generate a circuit of pure song."

Hardy's style is a little rugged. There is a certain gnarled grandeur like that of an oak. Mostly his diction is prosaic.

Hardy's metrical skill was much better than many of the contemporary poets. "I doubt if any English poet has more studied the craft of verse, or invented more new metrical forms and variations than Hardy" (F. L. Lucas).

Hardy's greatest work is *Dynasts*. His *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1902) pale into insignificance before the majesty of *Dynasts*. This monumental epic-drama was issued from 1904 to 1908. It deals with the war with Napoleon from 1805 to 1815 and consists of nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes. It is in the words of Lascelles Abercrombie, "the biggest, the most consistent and deliberate exhibition of fatalism in Literature."

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**Q. 29. Write a note on the writers of Light Verse and Parody during the Victorian Age.**

**Ans.** Lucilius was the first great poet who cultivated the art of writing satirical and humorous poetry in a mocking style. Butler, the author of *Hudibras* and Matthew Prior, the witty composer of *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*, a burlesque on the *Hind and the Panther* of Dryden, got their inspiration from Lucilius, and passed on the buck to Victorian parodists and writers of light verse.

Among the Victorians there were a number of parodists and writers of humorous work. This 'light brigade' includes many familiar names. John Hookham Frere (1769-1846) was a master in the art of composing witty verses and wrote fine lines like—

*Dinner and supper kept their usual hours*

*Breakfast and luncheon never were delayed.*

He outshone Gay in witticism and influenced parodists like James and Horace Smith. Later on Richard Barham (1788-1845) shot into fame by his *Ingolds by Legends* which proved "a little godsend to Victorian reciters though their popularity, once so great, has declined almost to zero of late year." Theodore Hook (1788-1841) was the master of 'audacious sallies of wit', and the following lines which he wrote on Mr. Winter, a tax collector—exhibit his wit :

*Here comes Mr. Winter collector of taxes*

*I'd advise you to pay him whatever he axes,*

*Excuse won't do ; he stands no sort of flummery*

*Though Winter his name his process is Summary.*

James Robinson Planche (1796-1880) had a knack of presenting extravagant things in a humorous manner. His verses are marked with "a play of fancy and a lighter touch, and his humour wears better than that of Hook." Samuel Lover (1797-1868) the Irish man, won his laurels by his whimsical and Celtic humour :

*In youth—we've our troubles before us,*

*In age—we leave pleasure behind.*

Butterfly Baly (1797-1839) wrote light humorous verse, and though the Butterfly is lower than the Lover, yet he is unforgettable and has his place among the group of the light brigade by his *Why don't the Men Propose?* In Winthrop Mackworth Praed

(1802-1839), we have a writer of the genius of Matthew Prior. In his lighter verse, there is "some affinity with Hood, but he relies far less on mere verbal humours, and his wit has a finer bouquet." Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885) was happiest when he wrote in "light and irresponsible mood." Edward Lear (1812-1888) was more than a mere writer of light verse. "He is one of the great original comic forces of the century, and his incomparable *Nonsense Verses* constitute a land mark in the development of humorous literature." Fredrick Locker-Lampson (1821-1895) excelled Praed in poetic fire though he was less 'dexterous and polished in his triflings." Charles Stuart Calverley (1831-1884) was a famous parodist of Browning and his *The Cock and the Bull* is well known for its imitation of Browning. His mantle fell on J. K. Stephen and not less brilliant R. F. Murray. William S. Gilbert (1836-1911) won fame by his *Bibbittads*. Here we have humorous thumb nail sketches. The gaiety of his verse is pleasing. Henry S. Leigh (1837-1889) wrote *Carols of Cockayne*, 'facile, nimble, pleasantries in verse.' Lewis Carroll was another great writer of witty and humorous verse. The example of these light verse writers has been followed by a host of 20th century writers of verse and parodies. In modern times Sir Owen Seaman, R. C. Lehmann, C. L. Graves, E. V. Lucas, Barry Pain, Dum-Dum, Adrian Ross and Harry Graham have won laurels in the field of light verse. *Punch* gives the fullest scope for all those who are gifted with a light vein, and can compose pleasing parodies and write witty and extravagant verse.

**Q. 30. What are the main trends and features of Victorian Poetry?**

**Ans.** The poetry of the Victorian age presents a wide variety. While some of the Victorian poets were interested in the presentation of Victorian life in their poetry, others kept themselves away from the cross currents of the social, political, and economic life of the age. In the poetry of Tennyson, we hear echoes of Victorian life, and he is the poet of the age expressing not so much a personal as a national spirit. "For nearly half a century" says W. J. Long, "Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a voice, the voice of a whole people expressing



in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, griefs and their triumphs. As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era." Tennyson's poetry stands as representative of the age and is an epitome of his times. It is one of the marked features of Victorian poetry to represent the social, political, economic conditions of the age. Mr. Browning draws our attention to the deplorable state of industrial affairs of the age in *Cry of Children* and Tennyson refers to the progress achieved on the material plane in *Locksley Hall*.

In contrast to Tennyson, there stands the unique figure of Browning expressing another trend of Victorian poetry, namely its preoccupation with spiritual, philosophical and moral problems.

The Pre-Raphaelite poets strike another note in Victorian poetry. The poetry of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne is far away from the materialistic problems of the age, and is a revival of the romantic spirit which had been sounded with great success by Coleridge, Keats and Shelley. In a way Victorian poetry is an extension of romantic poetry, particularly in its preoccupation with the middle ages, mysticism, supernaturalism. The spirit of Romanticism continued to influence the innermost consciousness of the age which gave a Tennyson, a Thackeray, a Browning and an Arnold. To quote A. J. Wyatt, "The poetry of the age of Tennyson does not differ from that of Wordsworth's contemporaries as a result of any change of theory. There is a difference, but the difference is not fundamental as is that between Pope's poetry and Wordsworth's. Tennyson and his contemporaries recognised the authenticity of their immediate predecessors and were influenced by them. Especially is this influence noticeable in the debt of Tennyson to Keats and Arnold to Wordsworth."

The romantic spirit of the age of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley is reflected in the pessimistic strain in Victorian poetry. The poetry of Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, James Thomson and Fitzgerald is marked with pessimism and despair. The elegiac note in Arnold's poetry is as conspicuous as the optimistic note in Browning's poetry. In Victorian poetry we hear notes of pessimism as well as inspiring words of optimism spoken by Browning. "Tennyson's immature work, like that of the minor

poets, is sometimes in a doubting or despairing strain; but his *In Memoriam* is like the rainbow after storm; and Browning seems better to express the 'spirit of his age in the strong, manly faith of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and in the courageous optimism of all his poetry."\*

The moral note is sounded by Victorian poets, and almost all of them have a message to impart through their poetry. The poetry of Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, Christina Rossetti is ridden by a message. All these poems have superb faith in their message. Browning gives the message of struggle against heavy odds in human life; Matthew Arnold has the message of stoicism and endurance of all pains and inflictions; Tennyson gives the message of lawful living; Christina Rossetti of renunciation and resignation. Art for Art's sake without any moral message is no doubt pursued by the Pre-Raphaelites, but their adoration of art, love, and painting is not so impressive as the message of Victorian poetry.

We find several poetic forms cultivated by the Victorian poets. The lyric output was very large and varied. In descriptive and narrative poetry there was a great advance particularly noticeable in Tennyson and Morris. Tennyson thought of reviving the epic, but in him epical impulse was not sufficiently strong and his great narrative poems were produced as smaller fragments which he called *Idylls*. Browning perfected the dramatic monologue, and made it a patent instrument of self-expression.

Different kinds of poetic styles were cultivated by the Victorian poets. "In the case of poetry the more ornate style was represented in Tennyson who developed artistic schemes of vowel music, alliteration, and other devices in a manner quite unprecedented. The Pre-Raphaelites carried the method still further. In diction they were simpler than Tennyson, but their vocabulary was more archaic and their mass of detail more highly coloured. The style of Browning was to a certain extent a protest against the aureate diction. He substituted for it simplicity and a heady speed, especially in his earlier lyrics, his more mature obscurity was merely an effect of his eager

imagination and reckless impetuosity. Matthew Arnold, in addition, was too classical in style to care for over-developed picturesqueness, and wrote with a studied simplicity. On the whole, however, we can say that the average poetical style of this period, as a natural reaction against the simpler methods of the period immediately preceding, was ornate rather than simple.”\*

With its superb production, the Victorian Age produced no supreme poet. It revealed no Shakespeare, no Shelley, nor a Byron, or a Scott. “The age produced no questionably major poet, but only a number of technically accomplished poets who look major but remain essentially minor. There is perhaps the clearest indication of some deficiency in the creative work of the period. Where so much poetry was written and read, it is puzzling that there should be so little that is comparable with Blake’s *Songs of Experience*, Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, Crabbe’s *Tales in Verse*, or Byron’s *Vision of Judgement*. It is, as if, the act of composition in Victorian poetry did not take place as a result of pressures within the minds of individual poet’s but had its origin in more general impression and aims.”\*\*

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# PROSE OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

## MISCELLANEOUS PROSE WRITERS

**Q. 31.** Give an account of the main works of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881).

**Ans.** Thomas Carlyle was the dominant figure of the Victorian period. He was one of the most leading personalities of the age. He started his literary career by writing a few pamphlets and later on harnessed his pen to the production of many monumental works which made him immortal in the history of English Literature. The main works Carlyle are : *Sartor Resartus*, *French Revolution*, *Heroes and Hero-worship*, *Past and Present*, *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, *Life of John Sterling*, *The History of Fredrick the Great* and *Letters and Reminiscences*. We will briefly deal with each of his works.

**(1) Sartor Resartus (1833-34).**

*Sartor Resartus* is Carlye's first creative work and is rightly regarded as the quintessence of his philosophical thoughts. In this book Carlyle seeks to present the views and opinions of a German philosopher at the university of Weissnichtwo. The name of the professor is Her Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. Carlyle only works as an editor, editing the old Professor's manuscripts which are supposed to consist of numerous sheets packed into twelve paper bags, each labeled with the sign of zodiac. Carlyle seeks to be "an expositor of this weltering mass of words, endeavouring desperately to extract order out of chaos, and to lighten the dark and mystic abysses of the German professor's thoughts." Though the aims and opinions set forth in these volumes are those of the old German professor yet they are really speaking the views of the author himself. In fact, Carlyle sets forth his own dreams and ideals under the guise of the German professor. Albert rightly

says, "It is an extraordinary book, pretending to contain the opinions of a German professor; but under a thin veil of fiction Carlyle discloses his own spiritual struggles during his early troubled years. The style is violent and exclamatory, and the meaning is frequently obscured in a torrent of words, but it has an energy and a rapturous ecstasy of revolt that quite take the breath away."\*

In this monumental work Carlyle expounds "clothes-philosophy." In the first place clothes stand for shams and pretences, hollow rank, hollow officialism and hollow customs. All these are designated as clothes because they hide the real form of society. These clothes must be burnt for they have outlived their utility. These clothes are mechanical in character and cannot have any place in a society set upon spiritual progress. Later on the 'clothes-philosophy' is applied to the universe at large. Just as clothes hide the real society, similarly time and space, which are no better than clothes, hide the spiritual essence of the universe. This spiritual philosophy of the universe is developed with great force and is couched in a style which is picturesque though at places incoherent and confused. Many of the passages in this book read like poetry and the reader's attention is particularly directed to such chapters as the 'Everlasting No,' 'The Everlasting Yes' 'Reminiscences' and 'Natural Supernaturalism.'

## (2) The French Revolution (1837)

Carlyle's *French Revolution* is a prose epic of the great cataclysm that shook Europe and ushered in a new way of life. Carlyle's aim in writing the history of the French Revolution is not to be a record of the dry-as-dust events that are generally presented by a historian. Instead of being the historian of the French Revolution, Carlyle chooses to be its poet and in a fascinating and picturesque style he presents the events and the great personages of the French Revolution. "The French Revolution is not a history; indeed Carlyle had not the makings, for his vision is not panoramic. He never seeks to retell the story of the past, but to explain the significance of the past, and this he does in a series of pictures, rather than the physical appearances."\*\*

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Compton Rickett: A History of English Literature.

Carlyle's response to the experience of history of the French Revolution is more akin to that of a painter rather than to a thinker. He portrays the events and figures of the French Revolution in the language of visual or audible sensation than in the logical speech of scientific thought or reason. Carlyle throws flash lights upon men in dramatic situations, and brings out the striking scenes of French history and French heroes in a picturesque and colourful style, aglow with zest and enthusiasm. As we go through the pages of this prose poem or dramatic poem, we feel that we are reading a great piece of literature rather than a dry record of history. The book appears to us a series of word pictures rather than sober history and we feel hypnotised with the wealth of the colour and the richness of imagery, with which the events are unfolded by the great author. There is no exaggeration in L. P. Smith's observation that Carlyle's "great prose-poem on the French Revolution is not only a great gallery of scenes and portraits depicted in the smoke and glare of that volcanic outburst, but it is a great tone-poem as well, a rushing vociferous piece of orchestral music, resonant with trumpets and battle-cries, with salvoes of artillery and wild peals of tocsin-bells ringing from all steeples."

Carlyle's moral vigour comes out in this stirring narrative of stormy events and personages. He emphasises the working of moral justice in human affairs and draws our attention to the nemises that must over-take the wrong-doers. "He is here the preacher rather than the historian, his text is the eternal justice; and his message is that all wrong doing is inevitably followed by vengeance."\*

### (3) **Heroes and Hero-worship. (1841)**

This book was originally delivered in the form of lectures on heroes and hero-worship and was printed in 1841. Carlyle was a great hero-worshipper and burnt incense at the altar of heroes whom he considered to be the real rulers of the world. Carlyle had no faith in democracy, which was for him the last word of political unwisdom. He was never weary of insisting that the great masses of people needed the guidance and leadership of the hero or able men. The salvation of the world lay in recognising

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\* W. J. Long : English Literature.

the leadership of the heroes and acting according to their dictates. "Great men," he wrote in *Sartor Resartus*, "are the inspired Texts of the Divine Book of Revelation where of a chapter is compiled from epoch to epoch and by some named History." In Carlyle's opinion the best way to arrive at the truth of history was to study the biography of the great men "for universal history is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here."

In *Heroes and Hero-worship* Carlyle directs our attention to heroes drawn from six branches of life. He presents six types of heroes (1) The Hero as Divinity, having for its general subject Odin, "the type Norseman" who had been later on deified by his countrymen, (2) The hero as Prophet, dealing with Mahomet and the rise of Islam, (3) The Hero as Poet, in which Dante and Shakespeare are chosen as models, (4) The Hero as priest or religious leader, in which Luther stands out as the Hero of the Reformation and Knox as the hero of Puritanism, (5) The Hero as Man of Letters concentrating on Johnson, Rousseau and Burns. (6) The Hero as king in which Cromwell and Napoleon figure prominently. "It is needless to say that *Heroes* is not a book of history; neither is it scientifically written in the manner of Gibbon. The book abounds in errors; but they are the errors of carelessness and are perhaps of small consequence. With the modern idea of history as the growth of freedom among all classes, he has no sympathy. At certain periods, according to Carlyle, God sends us geniuses, sometimes as priests or poets, sometimes as soldiers or statesmen, but in whatever guise they appear, they are our real rulers. The book abounds in startling ideas, expressed with originality and power and is pervaded throughout by an atmosphere of intense moral earnestness."\*

Carlyle's style in this book is comparatively easier than in his other works and the colloquial tone of the author can be felt almost throughout the work. Still here and there we have "insistent, teasing, rubbing-the-reader's-nose-in-it style which is the mark of all that Carlyle writes."\*\*

#### (4) Past and Present. (1843)

This book is the most penetrating and influential of all the

\* W. J. Long : English Literature

\*\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.

many books which were inspired by the critical, social and industrial conditions prevalent during the Victorian Age. Carlyle completely repudiated the spirit of contemporary England in this monumental work. "It is", he wrote to John Sterling, "a moral, political, historical and a most questionable red-hot indignant thing for my heart is sick to look at the things now going on in England." A medieval monastic community governed by Abbot Samson is chosen as an ideal society for the materialistic people of the Victorian Age. Carlyle presents, with all the impassioned zeal of a Hebrew prophet, his denunciation of the many evils rising out of the worship of the "mud-gods of modern civilisation." Here, Carlyle denounces scientific materialism and utilitarianism which went along with it. In fact all sinister isms such as dilettanism, mammonism, hedonism, utilitarianism, imperialism meet hammer-blows at his powerful hands.

**(5) Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches (1845)**

Cromwell was Carlyle's hero and in this work he seeks to present the greatness of the Puritan leader who exercised great influence on the life of the English people for a number of years in the seventeenth century. Cromwell had been a subject of great controversy and many historians had denounced him in rabid terms. Carlyle comes to the rescue of Cromwell in this book and salvages the lost reputation of the great lord protector who raised the prestige of England in foreign countries, though his greatness at home was a mere shadow of his greatness abroad.

**(6) The Life of Sterling (1851)**

*Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* won popular applause and gave him an incentive to write *The Life of Sterling*. "It is a fine biography recounting the life of Sterling who had exercised a great influence on Carlyle's spiritual and moral fierce worship or hot intensity that inform most of Carlyle's works. There is an atmosphere of spiritual calm, curiously unlike the prevalent mood of the writer."\*

**(7) History of Fredrick the Great. (1858-65)**

Carlyle's interest in German thought brought him to the study of Fredrick the Great, one of the greatest historical figures of Germany for all times to come. Carlyle went over to Germany

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\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.



to study first-hand details connected with the great Prussian king. He produced a detailed history of Fredrick the Great in six volumes. It is the greatest intellectual feat performed by Carlyle. "The book severely taxed Carlyle's powers as we may believe when we consider its scope and content; and it is one of the hardest to construe of the author's writings, largely because Carlyle's mannerisms of style are nowhere more abundant."

#### (8) Letters and Reminiscences.

Carlyle's *Letters and Reminiscences* are of great importance since they throw a flood of light on his life and character. His literary essays on Burns, Scott, Goethe, Byron reveal him as a critic. Carlyle's opinions on English men of letters are expressed from a personal point of view and are often one-sided and prejudiced. They are more valuable as a revelation of Carlyle himself than as an objective study of the author under consideration.

**Q. 32. Give your estimate of Thomas Carlyle as a literary artist.**

**Ans.** Thomas Carlyle, the many-sided genius, is well-reflected in his works. He comes before the readers in various capacities; as a literary artist, a critic of literature, as a seer, as a prophet, as a political thinker and finally as an historian. We shall discuss Carlyle primarily as a literary artist in this question.

#### **As a Literary Artist.**

Carlyle did not have a high opinion of art and spoke contemptuously of art, as art. He had no patience with the merely bookish side of literature nor with the glorification of beauty and art for its own sake. Though Carlyle had no high opinion of art such as was held by the Pre-Raphaelites, yet he was in his own way one of the greatest literary artists that England had produced during the Victorian Age. Carlyle liked to be considered as a moralist rather than as an artist, but posterity has come to fix its attention not on the moralist in Carlyle but on the great unconscious artist beneath his garbs as a prophet.

As a literary artist Carlyle stands very high in the portrayal of graphic, vivid and clear pictures. He is a pictorial artist, and the pictures that he has left behind in prose are more colourful and picturesque than many of the paintings bequeathed to posterity.

by painters in colour. Henry James saw deeper into the matter and said that "Carlyle was in essence not a moralist at all but an artist; picturesqueness in men and nature was what he cared for in all the things. He was, in fact, a painter who followed the good and evil of the world as a painter does his pigments for the opportunities they give for the display of his pictorial powers." Carlyle's art in pictorial painting of landscape and hill-side is as well marked out as his portrayal of human character. His pictures of the hills and the rivers are as picturesque as those of men whom he had known. Here are a few examples. "The hills stand snow-powdered, pale, bright. The black hailstorm awakens in them, rushes down like a black swift ocean tide; valley answering valley, and again the sun blinks out, and the poor sower is casting his grain into the furrow, hopeful he that the Zodiacs and far Heavenly Horologes have not faltered; that these will be yet another summer added for us and another harvest."

His pictures of men are no less revealing. Like a skilled jeweller in words he presents Danton, Robespierre, Bacon, Shakespeare, Coleridge and a great many other figures whom he knew intimately. The following felicities of expression exhibit the art of a skilled jeweller in words, "Bacon sees—Shakespeare sees through." "Swift carried sarcasm to an epic pitch." "Coleridge was like an engine of a hundred horse power with the boiler burst." "Carlyle's vivid power of expression enables us to accompany his sonorous personality through a long period of the nineteenth century; and the incomparable keenness of the vision of his all-devouring eyes catches for us in lightning flashes, or depicts in finished portraits, the great figures of his age."

### **Carlyle's Style.**

Carlyle's early crude and rugged prose-style stands contrasted with the richness and resonance of his latter style and the difference is mainly due to the immense vocabulary he had acquired and the most farfetched phrases of remote allusions that he had come to command with the passage of time. In his later years Carlyle had a complete command of the English languages. Language was a play-thing in his hands and he toyed with his ideas in the manner he liked. Like Sir Thomas Browne and Jermy Taylor, the great prose-writers of the seventeenth century, Carlyle cultivated a

prose-style in which splendour, music and resonance played an important part. Like these seventeenth century writers his prose had much of the splendour and music which makes English imaginative prose a magnificent organ of expression. The enormous wealth of vocabulary employed by Carlyle in constructing sentences sometimes short, sometimes long, marked with breaks and abrupt turns, apostrophies and exclamations, is unique in prose literature. At places such a style gives the impression of uncouthness and roughness but it cannot be disassociated with Carlyle for it is his habitual manner of writing. The habit of writing in a peculiarly controverted style with a rhapsody of denunciation, vituperation, scoffs and jeers, pathos and self-mockery and rablasion touches is something unique with the man and has not been cultivated by any other writer in the English language.

Carlyle cultivated different kinds of style suiting his subject-matter. In the *French Revolution* he cultivated a highly picturesque and poetic style marked with vividness and flashing light of colour. The jostling metaphors are not merely picturesque but energetic and convey a sense of the cataclysm that shook Europe with a thundering force. In this book Carlyle employs a symphony of musical sounds so that we hear a rushing vociferous piece of orchestral music, resonant with trumpets and battle cries. In *Sartar Resartus* there is the presence of a highly philosophical style marked with complexities of thought and ruggedness of expression, sometimes confused and sometimes suffering from Grammatical lapses. The style becomes peculiarly Carlylesse—"a disturbing, bewildering and often exasperating style"; "a style full of un-English idiom, of violent inversions, startling pauses, and sharp angularities—a style which he employed to rouse the attention of his reader by a series of electric shocks."

In the 'Life of Sterling' and 'Fredrick the Great' Carlyle wielded a style atonce matured and restrained, proceeding with absolute certainty of touch.

On the whole, Carlyle's style is picturesque and he is rightly considered the Rambrandt of English prose. No other writer of the Victorian age wrote with that picturesqueness and force which Carlyle employed in the expression of his philosophical, literary

and economic thoughts. His descriptive power and power of characterisation are really remarkable. The way in which he employed sarcasm, irony, invective, rhetoric and exhortation, sometimes in a conversational manner and sometimes in a pedagogic fashion, make him a great creator of an English prose style which few could imitate, for few writers had the intense moral fervour, and depth of feeling which Carlyle experienced when he gave expression to his thoughts.

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**Q 33. Give your estimate of Carlyle as a literary critic and a Prophet of his age.**

**Ans.** Carlyle was not a great critic of literature and the few observations that he has made about English men of letters are one-sided, and exhibit his personal likes and dislikes. He was obsessed by the biographical stand-point, and judged works of art and literary value from this standard. In his view there was nothing better than a good biography and he considered that, "there is no heroic poem in the world but is at bottom a biography," and conversely "there is no life of man, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of its sort rhymed or unrhymed."\*

This conviction deeply influenced Carlyle's criticism. He judged an author in relation to the exhibition of the inner spirit in his work. He always sought the Man behind his work. He had words of great admiration and applause for those authors who revealed themselves in their works and brought out the light of the spirit in their master creations. His critical essays are, in fact, an attempt to get at the Man beneath his literary trappings whether it be Richter or Burns or Scott or Johnson.

Carlyle could reach the heart of the subject and present the real truth about an author by his penetrative insight into his works. His penetration and reach were no doubt very great, and he could strike at the root of the matter in a trenchant and telling phrase. We can appreciate the *reach* of his observations in his remarks on Bacon, Swift and Coleridge. How pregnant are his observations, can be judged by his following remarks : (1) Bacon sees, Shakespeare sees through. (2) Swift carried sar-

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\* Carlyle's Essay on Sir Walter Scott.

casm to an epic pitch. (3) Coleridge was a steam engine of a hundred horse-power with the boiler-burst. (4) Goethe is the greatest genius that has lived for a century and the greatest ass that has lived for three.

Greater than a literary critic is Carlyle's work as a critic of his age. He was the prophet of his age, and viewed the social, economic and political life of his times from the view point of a seer and a philosopher. He seemed to be dissatisfied with the material glory, power and pelf of the rich capitalists of his time. As a critic of his age we find Carlyle condemning the so-called material progress of the age and the insistence of the people on the mechanical view of life. He poured the vials of his wrath upon the easy going optimism which had been bred by rapidly developing commercial prosperity of the age and denounced with the impassioned zeal of a Hebrew prophet the idolatrous worship of the mud-gods of modern civilisation. He attacked "the mechanical view of life, mechanical education, mechanical government, mechanical religion and preached, now with drollery and paradox, now with fiery earnestness and prophetic possession, a return to sincerity in all things."\*

It was Carlyle's aim as a critic of Victorian society to expose the shams and hypocrisies of the Memmon-worshippers of the age and subject their idols of life to the hammer-blows of his fiery denunciation. Throughout the *Past and Present* and *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle's dissatisfaction with his age, particularly with the social, political and economic values upheld by the philistines, is clearly brought out, and one cannot fail to be impressed by the earnestness and sincerity of the author who attacked them mercilessly with the vigour of a saint, a prophet and a preacher.

Not only was Carlyle a critic of his age, but he was also a reformer, a preacher and a sage with a definite programme for bringing about the moral elevation of the Memmon-worshippers of the age. He preached throughout his life the lessons of morality, sincerity, truthfulness and virtue. He exhorted the people of his times to rise above material power and pelf and realise the spiritual value of noble ideals of virtue and dignity of labour. With great sincerity, he exhorted the people of his times to lay aside

hypocrisy and to think and speak and live for the ideal of truth. He preached God and spiritual freedom of the only life-giving truths. He gave his advice at the top of his voice, sometimes with more emphasis than was needed and popularly came to be known as the 'shouting prophet'. Carlyle spoke disturbingly, if not always luminously to the troubled Victorian conscience. He could not indeed turn back the currents of his age in spite of his moral earnestness and sincerity of purpose. "Carlyle's failure to impose his narrow, rigoristic, moralistic, joyless Annandale view of the world upon the world, added an element of tragedy to his deeply tragic sense of life. He suffered also the deeper tragedy of those who attempt to deify the universe; who personify it as a God to find that they have made a Devil of it. Their cosmic piety plunges them into such abysses of moral contradiction that it becomes, as many believe it became with Carlyle, a mask of atheism and dark despair."\*

**Q. 34. Write a note on Carlyle as a political thinker and an historian.**

**Ans.** As a political thinker Carlyle was opposed to liberalism and the growing tide of democracy. He had no faith in democracy which was for him the best word of political unwisdom. He was never weary of insisting that the great masses of the people needed the guidance and leadership of the hero or able men. Carlyle cultivated the personality cult and laid emphasis more on obedience to men of authority and heroic mettle rather than struggle fruitlessly for rights in a democratic society. Carlyle considered democracy as a government of the fools. He believed in the gospel of might and the strong man. In his view the strong man was one who had spiritual convictions and strength of mind and soul. He had no belief in physical strength and applauded strength of character and mind. Those who were strong in character and spiritual convictions were worthy to be the rulers of our society. Carlyle had faith in heroes and geniuses rather than the democratic masses governed by passion and hysterical emotions.

As an historian Carlyle was not interested in recording the

\* Logan Pearsall Smith—Thomas Carlyle : The Rembrandt of English Prose.

dry-as-dust facts of history in a systematic manner. He was not a historian who cared for meticulous accuracy in the presentation of historical facts and in bringing out all the dust and scum that gathered round historical events. Carlyle was interested not so much in the events of history as in the heroes who gave them their vital significance. For him history was an interesting record of soul-stirring events manipulated by men of strength and character. His historical method was to concentrate mainly on the biographical details of great souls for in his view it was by studying the lives of great heroes, who moulded the destinies of a nation, that a better idea of history could be secured. Albert directs our attention to the basic facts about Carlyle's treatment of history in the following words. "Carlyle's method was essentially biographical—he sought out the 'hero', the super-man who could benevolently dominate his follows, and compel them to do better. Such were his Cromwell and his Fredrick. His other aim was to make history alive. He denounced the 'Dry-as-dust' who killed the recorded infinite detail of life and opinion and by means of his masculine imagination and pithy style he brought the subject vividly to his reader's eye."

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**Q. 35. Give a brief account of the main works of John Ruskin (1819-1900).**

**Ans.** John Ruskin was one of the greatest thinkers and writers of the Victorian Age. He was "a man of high moral principles, of splendid though ill co-ordinated intellectual power, of luxuriant imagination, all of which qualities he turned on to a rich variety of subject matter." He produced works of lasting value on a variety of subjects such as art, music, education and literature. Ruskin's works are voluminous and threading through them is like passing through a luxuriant garden, rich in fruit and flowers emanating fine fragrance from all quarters in such an over-cloying measure that one is likely to be detained by the loveliness of the first flower, the first blossoming tree in its vernal beauty, rather than proceed ahead to enjoy greater beauties at the farther end. Ruskin's works on art, social and political economy, literature and education are worthy of great consideration and will be treated one by one under the following heads :—

## (1) Works on Art.

Among Ruskin's works on art, the most significant are : *Modern Painters* (1843-60), *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), *Stones of Venice* (1851-53).

**Modern Painters (1843-60).**

Ruskin began as an art critic with the publication of five volumes of *Modern Painters* between 1843-60. The genesis of this famous work was Ruskin's desire to uphold Turner's paintings against the bitter attacks on his splendid works. Originally the work was a defence of Turner and an attack on his critics, but it developed into a comprehensive discussion of the principles of painting, especially landscape painting. "Ruskin is more eloquent and more charming when he is dealing with landscapes and describing the ways in which the imagination can respond to the subtle details of colour and form in the natural world than in endeavouring to make a direct connection between art and morality."\* The first volume was published in 1843, the second in 1846, the third and fourth in 1856 and the fifth in 1860. In these five volumes Ruskin presented his views about European painters and dealt with theories of art and different orders of landscape painters such as Heroic (Titian), Classical (Poussin), Astoral (Cuyp), Contemplative (Turner). The study of these volumes brings out Ruskin's attitude towards art and its relation to morality. Here are to be noticed his insistence on beauty, imitation of nature and the moral values of art. Ruskin also discussed the relation of painting with history, religion and social conditions. Nothing in the book, however, was so praiseworthy as his style. The descriptions of Alpine scenery, the appreciation of great paintings such as Turner's *Slave-ship* and Tintoretto's *Crucifixion* represent Ruskin's command of the English language particularly in its rhetorical side. The caustic denunciation of bad art, such as the analysis of Wouverman's 'Landscape with a Hunting Party' is trenchant, forceful and vigorous and exhibits the author's utmost dislike for slipshod work and work of bad art. Here and there are a few digression in the book, for example the chapter on 'Vulgarity' and the suggestive discussion of 'Pathetic Fallacy' but these digressions

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.



are interesting in-as-much-as they reveal Ruskin's finest critical manner.

### **Seven Lamps of Architecture.**

In the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin deals with the leading principles of architecture. The seven lamps are those of Sacrifice, Truth, Power, Beauty, Life, Memory and Obedience. It is one of the least ornate of Ruskin's book, but it is one of the best reasoned. In this work Ruskin puts up a spirited defence of Gothic as the noblest and the finest style of architecture, and labours to relate art and morality. "The amount of sheer patient recording and cataloguing that has gone into his work on architecture reveals an immense tenacity of purpose : a quality which is not particularly rare, but one which can easily become mechanical. What is extremely rare is to find it allied with perpetual vitality and sensitiveness "\*\*

### **Stones of Venice.**

In *Stones of Venice* Ruskin explains the rise and virtue of the Gothic in terms of the moral virtues of the society that produced it and attributes its decline to the disappearance of that virtue. Throughout this work we find the author glorifying Gothic architecture and denouncing the pestelential art of the Renaissance, and advocating the demolition of the remnants of the Renaissance art.

The *Stones of Venice* is rich in passages of beautiful description, particularly about Venice and its panoramic surroundings. The description of St. Mark's Cathedral is one of the finest passages of loveliness and beauty in English prose.

From art Ruskin drifted to social and political subjects and his works on political economy are worthy of close examination.

### **Unto This Last (1860-62).**

This work was first contributed to Cornhill Magazine in the form of articles, but so great was the outcry at the novel economic views of the author that Thackeray, the editor of the Magazine, had to discontinue the publication of Ruskin's papers. It was later on published by a daring publisher after its appearance in *Fraser's Magazine* edited by Froude. The work consists of four

essays : (1) The roots of Honour, (2) The veins of wealth, (3) Qui Judicates Terram (4) Ad Valorem. In these essays Ruskin deals with the problem of wages, the relation of the employers and the labourers and the true nature of wealth consisting not in material products but in, "the producing of as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed and happy hearted human creatures." The entire work is, in fact, an attack on the prevalent system of political economy. The main aim of the author is to expose the materialism of the age and to draw the attention of the industrialists and the leaders of the state to give more attention to the spiritual side of man's life than merely to his physical needs.

Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was considered at the time of its publication as the beautiful vapouring of an impractical idealist. To the materialists of the age interested in money earning the work seemed certainly impractical, but the latter socialists found a hard core of wisdom in the book and worked out its tenets in actual practice. Much of what Ruskin had set out to propound is now an accomplished fact and in socialistic countries the message of *Unto This Last* has been imbibed in the fullest measure possible. It is increasingly recognised that machines tend to demoralise and dehumanise man and that means must be sought to make man the master and not the servant of the machines.

The great value of this work lies mainly in the direction of labour reform. Ruskin chalks out a full programme for improving the conditions of labourers and their relationships with the capitalists. The author stresses the need of establishing training schools for labourers and pleads for the eradication of unemployment from the ranks of the workers by providing them opportunities for work. For the old and infirm workers Ruskin advocates the establishment of comfortable homes where they may be able to receive proper attention. All this has to be done in justice and not in charity because "the labour serves his country as truly as does soldier or statesman and a pension should be no more disgraceful in one case than in the other."

#### **Munera Pulveris (1862-63)**

This work consists of a series of articles on political economy published in *Fraser's Magazine* (1862-63), the remainder of which was suppressed by popular clamour. The work was published in book

form in 1872. It purports to be an 'accurate analysis of the laws of political Economy', and the prevailing conceptions about wealth of Ruskin attacks the conceptions of wealth which were held dear by orthodox economists. He condemns and criticises the out-moded theories of political economists and suggests that true political economy ought to be a branch of sociology because ultimately there is no wealth but life. In a sense *Munera Pulveris* is an elaboration of the principles, generally negative, laid down in *Unto this Last*.

#### **Time and Tide (1867).**

*Time and Tide* is mainly in the form of letters addressed to one Dixon, a working wood-cutter. The author lays emphasis on social regeneration rather than mere political reform such as was brought about by the second Reform Bill. In this book Ruskin seeks to point out that the condition of England in its social and economic side was a matter of greater attention and concern than merely giving political rights and establishing constituencies and ballot boxes. The work principally deals with the problem of poverty and its removal from society.

#### **The Crown of Wild Olive (1866).**

The work consists of four lectures delivered in 1866—the first *On War*, delivered at the Royal Military Academic; the second on *the Future of England* at the Royal Artillery Institute, the third *On Work* to a working men's institute; the fourth in the Bedford Town-hall on *Traffic*, in the sense of buying and selling. In the lecture *On War* Ruskin exhibits the importance of war and its relation to the development of art. All great art is developed during a period of war and is ruined in a state of peace. In the *Future of England* the voice of the prophet is heard. In this work he exhorts the labourers to realise the dignity of labour and pleadingly admonishes the capitalists to be considerate towards their workers. In *Traffic* he deals with the problem of architecture. Ruskin had been invited to talk about the New Exchange building that the capitalists were about to build. Inviting the author the industrialists had hoped that he would give advice on the latest style of architecture. Instead of gratifying his hosts by praising their scheme and eulogising the architecture they were intending to set up, Ruskin in a satirical manner attacked the

materialism of the industrialists and replied to their welcome address that a style of architecture grew out of a way of life and could not be delivered by a visiting expert. Though the tone of the lecture is friendly yet it is marked with bitter irony. Ruskin pointed out that all good architecture was the expression of national life and character, and was produced by prevalent and eager national taste or desire for beauty. He elaborated his view point by stating that only noble and good persons of virtue were capable of producing good works of architecture. He illustrated his point by condemning the evil Renaissance art because it was based on luxury, and eulogised Gothic architecture because it was the product of individual workers who were noble and good at heart. Ruskin's view point is not upheld today and it is seriously doubted whether he was at all justified in making a sweeping generalisation about morality and its relationship to architecture.

#### **Sesame and Lilies (1885).**

This great work deals with the study of books and the position of women in society. The sub-titles of the work are *Of King's Treasuries* and *Of Queen's Garden*. In the first part of *King's Treasuries* Ruskin takes us to the realm of books and considers them to be 'King's Treasuries'. He examines 'books of the Hour' and 'books of all times', and exhorts the readers to study books of all times" for they contain the precious life-blood of an author. In the second part 'Of Queen's Garden,' he considers the question of woman's place and education which Tennyson had attempted to answer in *The Princess*. Ruskin's theory is that the purpose of all education is to acquire power to bless and to redeem human society; and that in this noble work woman must always play the leading part. Ruskin is always at his best in writing of women or for women, and the lofty idealism of this essay, together with its rare beauty of expression, makes it, on the whole, the most delightful and inspiring of his works.

To these two lectures Ruskin had added *The Mystery of Life*. It is a personal essay dealing with his own failures. The tone of this essay is pessimistic and sad, and differs from the spirit of the two lectures. On the whole, the work is penned in a masterly

manner and is the one single example of the author's mastery over the manifold chords of prose expression.

**Praetoria (1885-89).**

Ruskin's last work *Praetoria* is an unfinished autobiography. It was published during 1885-89. Ruskin presents glimpses of his boyhood days, his early training and a few sketches of his life as a school-boy. He portrays delightful pictures of his father, mother, aunts and even servants. As a revelation of the inner life of the author it is in the same line as Rousseau's *Confessions*.

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**Q. 36. Give your estimate of John Ruskin as a critic of art and literature.**

**Ans.** Ruskin began his career as a critic of art embracing in his sweep the study of painting and architecture in a special way and all other arts in a general way. In the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *Stones of Venice*, and the lecture on *Traffic in the Crown of Wild Olive* he dealt with the problems of architecture and its relation to morality and human life. He emphasised that good architecture was produced by men of noble and awakened conscience. Only in a highly virtuous society could good works of architecture be produced. He upheld Gothic architecture as the noblest and the finest example of good and virtuous builders of the past and condemned the architecture of the Renaissance and the commercial architecture of his own times. Ruskin's view point has not been upheld by modern thinkers, and it is stated that "the history of art can show periods of splendour when there was abundant moral depravity. Ruskin over-emphasises the correspondence between art and morality."\*

It was in the field of painting that Ruskin exhibited his originality of conception and novelty of approach. He introduced the *principle of Naturalism* in judging works of Art, particularly painting. The success of the artist lay in faithfully representing Nature. "The more I think of it," he says, "I find this conclusion more impressed upon me—that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in plain way." Judged by this principle of Naturalism, he found Turner, Tinteret, Verenose, as supreme artists for in

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\* Compton-Rickett: A History of English Literature.

their paintings there was the representation of Truth and fidelity to Nature. "Ruskin's value as an art critic lay chiefly in the impulse he gave to his generation to appreciate the beauty of natural phenomena; he showed them the absurdity of confounding the grandeur of Nature merely with her big scenic effects, when a blade of grass or an ordinary cloud could reveal as richly the possibilities of beauty."\*

Ruskin approached Painting from another aspect as well. He showed "that painting should be something more than an ingenious arrangement of pigments." It was not merely the arrangement of colour that gave to painting its real worth. Sincerity and truthfulness to the representation of Nature were to be valued more than the splashing of colour.

No amount of technical skill exhibited by an artist in painting or in architecture satisfied Ruskin. He was no appreciator of technical excellence and in his view the worth of painting was judged not by its craftsmanship, but by its general impression of goodness left on the reader's mind. Here is Ruskin himself stating his view in an unmistakable language. "Taste for *any* pictures or statues is not a moral quality, but taste for good ones is. Only here again we have to define the word "good". I don't mean by "good" clever, or learned—difficult in the doing. Take a picture by Teniers, of sots quarrelling over their dice : it is an entirely clever picture; so clever that nothing in its kind has ever been done equal to it; but is also an entirely base and evil picture. It is an expression of delight in the prolonged contemplation of a wild thing and delight in that is an "unmannered", or "immoral" quality. It is 'bad taste in the profoundest sense—it is the taste of the devils."

—Technically perfect, clever, even unsurpassable; but not worth Ruskin's appreciation.

"On the other hand," says Ruskin, "a picture of Titian's, or a Greek statue, or a Greek coin or a Turner landscape, expresses delight in the perpetual contemplation of a good and perfect thing. That is an entirely moral quality—it is the taste of the angels."

As a critic of Art in general, Ruskin, like Plato, allied Art

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\* Ibid.

to Morality and disfavoured the theory of art for art's sake. He gave to Art an ethical significance. "He believed that the springs of art lay far deeper into the moral nature of the artist and in the moral temper of the age and nation which produced it."\* "He was the first to judge work of art as if they were human actions, having moral and intellectual qualities, as well as the aesthetic; and he saw their total effect as the result of all those qualities and of the condition of the society in which they were produced."\*\*

Ruskin was opposed to the theory of art for art's sake. He believed that art and morality were closely allied and were varying manifestations of the same divine impulse; beauty being a consecrated revelation of God in the same measure as the expressions of morality in spiritually advanced souls

To sum up, Ruskin's view of art and its relation to human society is based on the following four principles (as pointed out by R. P. Mc Cutcheon and W. H. Vam)—

(1) The object of art, as of every other human endeavour, is to find and to express the truth.

(2) Art, in order to be true, must break away from conventionalities and copy nature.

(3) Morality is closely allied with art, and that a careful study of any art reveals the moral strength, or weakness of the people that produced it.

(4) The main purpose of art is not to delight a few cultured people but to serve the daily uses of common life.

Ruskin was not a great critic of literature like Matthew Arnold. His literary criticisms are sporadic and unsystematic. He adjudged authors by the same principle of Naturalism and morality that he applied to Art. He expressed his opinion on Homer, Shakespeare and Scott. In the field of literary criticism he suffered from the same short coming of 'excessive self-confidence' which marred his criticism of Art. He was often full of prejudice and presented one-sided pictures. Yet his criticism has its own place and Hugh Walker in the *Literature of the Victorian Era*, appraises it properly in the following words—"We may think his praise of Scott excessive, his appreciation of Shelley

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Arthur Clutton Brock : Ruskin.

inadequate. We may think the colours lurid in which he paints Dickens and the other novelists who represent 'foul fiction'. We may differ from him in a thousand ways; but the fact remains that his criticism is always stimulating and that we learn more from him even when he is most wrong-headed than we do from multitudes of criticisms to which no exception can be taken, but which lack the vitalising quality of Ruskin."\*

**Q. 37. Write a note on John Ruskin as a literary artist and his prose style.**

**Ans.** Ruskin was a great literary artist and his soul was stirred at the sight of beauty. He was moved to ecstasy at the sight of grandeur and loveliness in nature. He presented graphic and pictorial pictures of nature which rivalled the paintings of Pre-Raphaelites. He had been endowed with unerring perception of a meticulous artist, and God had given him the gift of building a whole picture, stroke by stroke, till the edifice reared by him seemed to be a monument of perfection and exquisite beauty. He cultivated the qualities of truth and sincerity in his artistic representations of nature and presented pictures which have not been rivalled by other word painters except, perhaps, by a few Pre Raphaelite poets like Rossetti and Morris.

#### **Ruskin's Prose Style.**

Ruskin was a superb master of the English language and he handled it with perfect ease, wielding a style in complete conformity and harmony with his needs. Generally speaking, his prose is in the tradition of poetic prose practised by De Quincey. In his prose works we come across super-abundance of figures of speech, excessiveness of imagery, ornateness, melody, grandeur and loftiness of expression. "His passages abound in purple passages, which are marked by sentences of immense length, carefully punctuated by a gorgeous march of image and epithet, and by a sumptuous rhythm that sometimes grows into actual blank verse capable of scansion."\*\*

Ruskin abounds in the other harmonies of prose and though

\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

\*\* Essays from Fredrick Harrison.



Cyril Connolly criticised his sonorous, ornate and polyphonic style in *The Enemies of Promise*, yet it cannot be denied that the criticism appears to be wide of the mark in case with Ruskin whose lofty thoughts and dignified constructive programmes needed a dignified vesture which he fitly employed for the expression of his thoughts. Ruskin provides a nice escape for readers who seem to be bored by English prose written in a dull, matter of fact and pedestrian style. Ruskin's sonorous, dignified poetic prose comes as a welcome relief after going through the prosaic writings of many dull authors.

Ruskin's place, in fact, is not among the writers of dull prose, but among those great masters who had given to English prose its emotional and poetic qualities. Ruskin is among the romantic renovators of English prose and is in the same line as Gibbon, Burke and De Quincey. Whatever could be effected by a gorgeous embroidery of words, whatever could be achieved by a lyrical effusion of passion, whatever was possible to a painter, with his command of dazzling colour; whatever music could be produced by a symphony of sound, was within the competence of Ruskin. In his prose, for the first time, we come across a happy blend of the eye of the landscape painter and the trained ear of a musician.

Ruskin was at heart a prophet and prophets do not generally speak or write the language that ordinary human beings employ in the expression of their commonplace thoughts. The Oracle of Delphi did not speak like the common citizens of Greece. Ruskin was a man of very sensitive nature and his soul was stirred to the innermost recess by the nobility of his subjects. He naturally employed the language of Biblical earnestness and exquisite beauty in the expression of his noble and profound thoughts. His style could be consciously poetic with an accumulation of clauses in a periodic sentence ending with a calculated close. Ruskin could also achieve lyric simplicity and fine directness in some passages of *Praeterea* and *Fors Clavigera*.

In short, Ruskin as a prose writer, "improved upon the example set by Landor, De Quincey, and the Romantic renovators of English prose; he still increased the range of its effects, by adding to harmony and animation the resources of the richest

imagination and colouring. Always poetic, his style is not always in perfect taste; it shows at times oratorical cadences, a superabundant wealth of words, and superfluous ornaments. The impression of a too continuous and pressing eloquence, which it leaves with the reader is bound up with the very sincerity of a zeal which is never half in earnest, whatever convictions it may adopt. This rhetoric and this monotony do not, however, take away their charm to their overpowering force from Ruskin's magnificent evocations, from his grand landscapes, transfused with the spirit of the highest pantheistic sublimity, nor even from his passages of masterly analysis, with all their picturesque precision of touch, their energy in the handling of detail. Through this exuberance of rhythmic and sonorous language there runs a more familiar, more spontaneous vein where the artist most happily reconciles forcefulness with simplicity like the *Fors Clavigera*.\*

**Q. 38. Write a note on Ruskin as a social reformer and a critic of the society of his times.**

**Ans.** Ruskin's early career was mainly devoted to the criticism of Arts, and he was a 'singularly erratic art critic.'\*\* He co-related arts to society, and it was his deepseated conviction that the arts should be regarded as the expression of the social milieu. At about forty, Ruskin shifted his interest from Arts to society and became a critic of the society of his times. Ruskin gave up criticism of art for criticism of society "because no one could go on painting pictures in a burning house." "For my own part" wrote Ruskin, "I have seceded from the study not only of architecture, but nearly of all art, and have given myself, as I would in a besieged city, to seek the best modes of getting bread and water for the multitudes, there remaining no question, it seems to me, of other than such grave business for the time." From 1860 onwards he produced books dealing mainly with the problems of his age. The period to which he is to be related as a social critic was the period when industrialism was at the height of its power. His social tirades were against the mid-years of the golden age of British

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\* Legouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

\*\* G. C Leroy : John Ruskin.

capitalism. Ruskin was one of the many Victorians who turned with a new seriousness to social questions when they found the beliefs of religion failing them in the turmoil of economic uproar in the country.

In Ruskin's social criticisms we not only notice the concern of the reformer for the outer maladies of the age, but also an expression of the inner tensions and neurosis of his own soul. "The fact is that in his social criticism Ruskin was often not dealing primarily with outer reality, but was resolving tensions and releasing aggressions of his own subconscious nature."\* His was a pathological case in many ways, and it was all good for England's social life. "The tone, the emotional power, and to a great extent the ideas of Ruskin's social criticism are to be explained, then, in terms of his neurotic nature."\*\*

Like Carlyle, Ruskin was horrified and disgusted with the sweeping tide of materialism and industrialism, and the sight of mills and factories emitting out foul smoke and spoiling the charm of the countryside pained him intensely and deeply. Hence the first thing that Ruskin did was to direct the attention of the Victorians to the evils of industrialism and to win them back to the life of simplicity and glorification of nature. The strength of Ruskin's social criticism lay in the clarity and force with which he vigorously assailed the irrationalities of the industrial system and the debasement of human nature brought about by the poisonous fumes of the machine system of production.

As a social reformer Ruskin sought to remove the evils of unemployment and low wages. He made heroic efforts to bring about healthy reforms in the living conditions of the labourers engaged in the monotonous task of tending machines. He exhorted the capitalists to improve the conditions of labourers working in their factories, and provide them all possible amenities of life. He made attempts to exorcize the spectre of poverty and disease stalking through the land. He laid emphasis on social justice and fair distribution of wealth.

Ruskin pleaded fervently for improving the lot of children who were sometimes subjected to inhuman practices. He protested

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\* Gaylord C. Leroy : *John Ruskin*

\*\* Ibid.

against the employment of children in factories, and appealed to sentiments of pity and sympathy among the philanthropists of the age,

Comparing the Victorian spectacle of poverty amid plenty, Ruskin came out with a thundering tone against the capitalist ridden society where every plus sign of wealth was balanced by a minus sign of poverty, but where the pluses "make a very positive and venerable appearance in the world," while the minuses have, on the other hand, a tendency to retire into back streets, and other places of shade,—or even to get themselves out of sight into gaves."<sup>1</sup> "Though England is deafened with spinning wheels" he exclaims, "her people have not clothes—though she is black with digging fuel, they die of cold—and though she has sold her soul for gain, they die of hunger." Comparing the ethics of the new society based on self-interest and selfishness, he denounced the "thrice accursed, thrice impious doctrine of the modern economist that to do the best for yourself, is finally to do the best for others."<sup>2</sup> "So far as I know" he says, "there is not in history record of anything so disgraceful to the human intellect as the modern idea that the commercial text, 'Buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest'.<sup>3</sup> He reminds the people of his age that the pursuit of material gain, which is considered by many economists as the foundation of national welfare, "is for christianity the root of all evil." "Your religion," he says, exhorted you to love your neighbour, but "you have founded entire science of political economy, or what you have stated to be the constant instinct of man—the desire to defraud his neighbour."<sup>4</sup> You "mock Heaven and its Powers, by pretending belief in a revelation which asserts the love of money to be the the root of *all* evil, and declaring, at the same time, that you are actuated in all chief deeds and measures by no other love." "I know no previous instance" he says in *Unto This Last*, "in

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1 Ruskin : *Unto This Last*.

2 Ruskin : *Lectures on Art*.

3 Ruskin : *The Crown of Wild Olive*.

4 Ruskin : *Unto This Last*.

5 Ruskin : *Fors Clavigera*.

history, of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion."

Ruskin not only became a critic of his society in its economic and social aspects, but also directed his attention to the political conditions of his age. He was as much opposed as Carlyle to the sweeping tide of democracy and a clamour for rights and privileges. He advocated a hierarchy of society in which each man gave orders to those below him and in turn carried out in obedience the wishes of captain, leader, bishop, or king. He criticised those political leaders who preached, "Stand up for your rights—get your division of living—be sure that you are well off as others, and have what they have I don't let any man dictate to you—have not you all a right to your opinion? are you not all as good as everybody else?" Ruskin stood against this ideal of liberty and stated in *Fors Clavigera*, "My own teaching has been that Liberty, whether in the body, soul or political state of man, is only another word for Death, and the final issue of Death, putrefaction." Ruskin believed in discipline rather than licence, authority rather than defiance. The dominant point in his political criticism is authoritarian one and this is primarily responsible for his failure as a constructive critic. Ruskin proved to be a severe critic of the society of his times, but his voice failed to have much effect on the mammon-worshippers of the age. The deepest impression made by Ruskin's social criticism as a whole, "is one of the pathos of an immense and tragic failure. It was a failure of which he himself was keenly aware. Unable either to shelve or to solve the problems of his age, he fell victim, he told Charles Eliot Norton, to a "daily maddening rage."\* He gives way to "the unmeasured anger against human stupidity" which can often be, as John Morley finely says, "one of the most provoking forms of that stupidity."\*\* He rages at the "money theory" of modern times, which "corrupts the Church, corrupts the household, destroys honour, beauty and life throughout the universe. It is the death incarnate of Modernism and the so-called science of its pursuit is the most cretinous, speechless,

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\* Letters to Norton.

\*\* Morley: Life of Cobden.

paralyzing plague that has yet touched the brains of mankind.”<sup>1</sup> He takes the preachers to task for giving support to Mill and to Mammon.<sup>2</sup> He lashes at his countrymen for letting “the destinies of twenty myriads of human souls” be determined by “the chances of an enlarged or diminished interest in trade.”<sup>3</sup> His invectives become increasingly violent until they reach the point of hysteria: “We English; as a nation, know not, and care not to know, a single broad or basic principle of human justice. We have only our instincts to guide us. We will hit anybody who hits us. We will take care of our own families and our own pockets; and we are characterized in our present phase of enlightenment mainly by rage in speculation, lavish expenditure on suspicion or panic, generosity whereon generosity is useless, anxiety for the souls of savages, regardlessness of those of civilized nations, enthusiasm for liberation of blacks, apathy to enslavement of whites, proper horror of regicide, polite respect for populicide, sympathy with those whom we can no longer serve, and reverence for the dead, whom we have ourselves delivered to death.”<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the invective turns into a shriek of loathing for “this yelping, carnivorous crowd, mad for money and lust, tearing each other to pieces, and starving each other to death, and leaving heaps of their dung and ponds of their spittle on every palace floor and altar stone.”<sup>5</sup> When we read Ruskin we are often, made to feel, as Leslie Stephen said, that we are “listening to the cries of a man of genius, placed in a pillory to be pelted by a thick-skinned mob, and urged by a sense of his helplessness to utter the bitterest taunts he can invent.”<sup>6</sup>

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1 Cook : Letter to Dr. John Brown.

2 Fors Clavigera.

3 Letter to the Scotsman August 6, 1859.

4 Works XVIII, 225 (Arrows of the Chase).

5 Works VII, Letter XLV11 (Fors Clavigera).

6 Leslie Stephen, : Mr. Ruskin's Recent Writings" Fraser's Magazine June 1874.

Q. 3<sup>o</sup> Write a note on Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) as an Essayist and an Historian.

Ans. Thomas Babington Macaulay was one of the leading personalities of the Victorian age. He was the main trumpeter of the material progress and industrial advancement that England had achieved during his time. He was a man of optimistic temperament and viewed every form of progress with an eye of appreciation and admiration. He was also a voracious reader, and spent his days and nights in the pursuit of learning and knowledge. He had gathered a rich store of information by his patient application to history and literature, and used his knowledge to his advantage both in his *Essays* and *History*. He was gifted with a remarkable memory. He could retain facts and reproduce them with flaming vividness and accuracy. He remembered many literary classics, like *Paradise Lost* by heart, and for literature 'as the imaginative exploration of the paradoxes of experience', he had a warm love. "Macaulay's passion for reading, and his marvellous retentive memory are the two characteristics that affect his work the most. Both as an historian and essayist his range of knowledge and faculty of vivid presentiment are always in evidence."\*

Macaulay comes before his readers in several capacities—as an Essayist, as an historian, as a politician, as a lawgiver, and above all as a Victorian figure. We are mainly concerned here with Macaulay as an Essayist and as an Historian.

**As an Essayist.**

The essays of Macaulay cover a wide field, but they can broadly be divided into two classes, the literary or critical, and the historical. Most of the essays of Macaulay were in the first instance contributed to magazines and seemed to have only six-weeks life. But soon they were lifted out of the ephemeral pages of current periodicals, and were presented to the reading public in book form. They have survived to-day as the monumental works of his life and will gaily pass on to the next generation.

The famous literary and critical essays of Macaulay are on Milton, Addison, Goldsmith, Dryden, Leigh Hunt, Congreve,

Byron, B con, Bunyan, Boswell, Southey and Dr. Johnson. Among the popularly well known historical essays the most vividly and picturesquely written are those on Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, Chatham, Marlborough, Fredrick the Great, Horace Walpole, William Pitt, and Sir William Temple. Most of these essays were written in the prime of life and were published between 1825 and 1845. He made good use of all the available matter on the subject and penned his essays with the object of providing delight to his readers. Macaulay wrote all his essays, literary as well as historical, from the historical point of view, rather than from the stand point of a critic. 'I am nothing' he says, 'if not historical.' If we take away the historical element from Macaulay's essays they lose all their charm. "Take away the historical element from them" says Hugh Walker, "and there is scarcely anything left." Macaulay loves to evade the task of literary analysis and treats the subject from the historian's point of view instead.

In the essays of Macaulay we need not search for accuracy of facts. "They are often one-sided and inaccurate" says W. J. Long. "His opinions" observes Albert, "were often one-sided and his great parade of knowledge was often flamed with actual error or distorted by his craving for antithesis and epigram." His judgments on Hastings, Marlborough, Boswell and Milton are faulty and have not been upheld by later critics. They betray ignorance of facts and proper evaluation of character. "Evidently Macaulay had not in the highest degree the power to comprehend character. In the description of externals he was admirable and to a certain degree he could penetrate motives but he had not that intuitive insight which give life to the historical figures of Shakespeare, Scott, and Carlyle."\*

Macaulay's essays are wanting in depth and philosophical reflection. He could not impart any reflective and philosophical vein to his writings. Gladstone's observation that Macaulay is "always conversing or reading or composing, but reflecting never" is applicable to most of his writings.

Whatever may be the shortcomings of the *Essays* from the point of view of matter and judgment, it cannot be denied that

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\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.



they are extremely pleasant in reading, and owe their popularity to their immense readability. "The difficulty with him is not, as with some others (the uncongenial Freeman, for example), to take him up, but to put him down : the eye races through those exciting, easy pages, fearful lest the chapter or the essay come to an end too soon. And the *Essays*, though not up to the standard Macaulay reached in the *History*, reveal this particular quality at its highest.\*

The *Essays* of Macaulay are indispensable for young people who are on the threshold of intellectual advancement and are just starting to take an interest in things of the mind. "How many people owe their first intellectual stimulus to the *Essays*. Arthur Balfour, in his *Autobiography*, has expressed the obligation of those hundreds of people, with minds worth speaking of, for whom the *Essays* opened a door to higher things."\*\*

On the technical side, the popularity of the essays is to be found in the wonderful style in which they have been penned. More important and delightful than the matter is the picturesque, oratorical, conversational, and debating style in which Macaulay presents his observations in his writings, particularly his *Essays*. "The quiet purity of Goldsmith, the severe perfection of Landor, the long harmonies of Ruskin are outside the range of Macaulay" says Hugh Walker, "but all the same he wins us by his eloquence, rhetoric, picturesqueness, clarity, vigour, and mastery of vivid description and racy narration." The debating qualities of his essays have been recognised by all critics. "Macaulay conducts his argument, like a debater rather than like a philosopher : his style might be called the apotheosis of this debating style. His debater's style, with its sharp contrasts and deft balances and comparisons, its exaggerations and simplifications and its rhetorical black and-white surface is for all its obvious weaknesses, a noble prose style, always full of life and energy, never languid or merely exhibitionist or self consciously sophisticated. It is a style admirably suited to Macaulay's temperament and to the tone and mood and purposes of his writing."†

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\* A. L. Rowse : *Macaulay's Essays*.

\*\* Ibid.

† David Daiches : *A Critical History of English Literature*, Volume II.

**Macaulay as an Historian**

Macaulay originally planned to write a history of England from the accession of James II in 1685, to the death of George IV in 1830 "in a manner so concrete, picturesque, and dramatic that his narrative of actual events should have the fascination of romance," and as he himself desired, should have the "power to supersede the last fashionable novel upon the dressing table of young ladies." What Macaulay really intended to do was not to present a dry-as-dust account of the events of history. He sought to bring the colour of his lively imagination and the richness of his majestic style to the narration of historical events and the portrayal of historical characters. He strove to leave behind Sir Walter Scott in the creation of vivid history without much of fiction in it. Even if a little admixture of exaggeration was needed, Macaulay had no objection to that, for in his view, "The best portraits are perhaps those in which there is a slight mixture of caricature, and we are not certain that the best histories are not those in which a little on the exaggeration of fictitious narrative is judiciously employed. 'Something is lost in accuracy but much is gained in effect.'"

Macaulay could not complete the History according to his plan. Only five volumes covering a history of sixteen years were published during his life time. "It has been estimated" says Long, "that to complete the work on the same scale would require some fifty volumes and the labour of one man for over a century."

Macaulay's aim was to provide a detailed and graphic picture of the history of the period for which he had a special liking. Before penning down his thoughts, Macaulay "read numberless pages, consulted original documents and visited the scenes which he intended to describe." Thackeray made the significant remark which savours of exaggeration that "Macaulay reads twenty books to write a sentence and travels one hundred miles to make a line of description."

Macaulay's History is a pageant of pictures, a panorama of visual history, unfolding the events and portraying the historical characters with vividness and realism. Macaulay makes his History as engrossingly captivating and interesting as a novel of Sir Walter

Scott. He gives to his characters the reality of flesh and blood. His narration is more picturesque than a picture book presenting scenes of History. He gives a "broad and luminous canvas covered with firmly delineated pictures, which change before our eyes into new groupings, and give place to other spectacles as in a magic."

"The merits and defects of *Essays* are repeated in *The History of England*, the former heightened and the latter subdued by the greater labour bestowed. The style is essentially the same, but is more chastened. There are the same tricks and mannerisms, the same brilliant colouring, the same tendency to exaggeration, the same fondness for antithesis. At first the reader is probably swept away by admiration of its rapid facility, its rush and brilliancy, its fertility of illustration, its strength and effectiveness. Afterwards he may gradually become conscious of those defects which are suggested by the adjective "metallic" which Arnold applies in censure to Macaulay's prose and Mrs. Browning by way of praise to his verse."\* Lord Houghton calls Macaulay "a great historical orator and oratorical historian," and R. E. Jebb, one of the ablest of his critics, endorses this view. Macaulay was nothing if not oratorical and his style is almost the perfection of rhetorical excellence.

"His energetic and persuasive style, his adroit manipulation of illustrative facts, and artful alternation between generalization and detail, combine to make him one of the most readable of extended histories."\*\*

Macaulay's History in spite of the vividness and picturesqueness of details is deficient in many ways. Compton-Rickett pin-points the defects of Macaulay's History. "In the first place, Macaulay's imagination is panoramic, not stereoscopic. He can see with force and clearness the outlines of his pictures; but he rarely sees beyond the outline. He sees, but does not see through. His pages present us with a wonderfully varied and extensive surface of life. But it is only surface. He has scarcely anything of Carlyle's insight into character—that quality which gives stereoscopic body to *The French Revolution*."

\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

\*\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.

"In the second place, there is no philosophy in Macaulay's outlook.\* The world for him is a brilliant pageant; and admittedly the aspects of peasantry are worth nothing. But it is something more than a pageant, it is a play of elemental forces kept in fitful leash by the hand of civilization and breaking away at times with dramatic violence. Macaulay saw nothing of this ; or if he did, it had no interest for him."

Macaulay had been the victim of prejudices. He had bias which is not a virtue but a demerit in a historian. He looked at history from a coloured glass. He magnified the virtues of those heroes whom he liked and condemned others who were not his liking. "He was apt to see through a magnifying-glass what was in their favour, and to look through the wrong end of the telescope at whatever militated against them" Macaulay eulogised Whig heroes. "His heroes are more estimable but infinitely more commonplace." They do not impress us as the heroes of Carlyle. "Neither, it must be admitted, was there anything very attractive in the objects of his admiration. The English Whigs were a useful class of people, but they were neither intellectually great nor morally inspiring. They were the apotheosis of the commonplace, and the selection of them as heroes proves that there was some foundation for the charge of Philistinism which was brought against the historian."\*\*

What is Macaulay's place among the Historians of the world ? He is assured of a high place at least among the Historians of England. If Macaulay is inferior to the greatest historians, he is inferior to them alone, but among the historians of his country, he has a place of pride. "He had not the breadth and range of Gibbon ; he has not the vivid poetic gift of Carlyle or his wonderful power of penetrating character. He is no rival to Thucydides in the art of tracing the sequence of cause and effect in human history, or to Tacitus in the keen and terse wisdom of his utterances. But he is a consummate master

\* "We do not find in Macaulay a profound view of underlying causes; that large intellectual interpretation of events which constitute the Philosophy of history " (Moody-Lovett).

\*\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

of narrative, and in this respect is probably surpassed only by Herodotus."

**Q. 40. Write an essay on Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) and the Oxford Movement.**

**Ans.** Cardinal Newman was one of the greatest Victorian writers and the greatest figure in the Oxford Movement. He was at heart a religious man, a man of deep faith and conscience, and it pained him much to view the forces of industrialism and scientific advancement making strong dents on the faith of the religious-minded men and women of the age. Newman, with a faithful band of followers, strove hard to stem the tide of advancing materialism and keep away from the fold of Roman Catholic church the vices that had crept into the church of England. Newman and his followers started, what is known in Church history as the Oxford Movement, with the deliberate object of keeping alive the ritualism and faith of Roman Catholic religion, against the popular views of liberal Christians like Thomas Arnold, who fastened on the ethical significance of Christianity and minimised the importance of ritual, of "theological Articles of opinion" "and all this stuff about the true Church." The Oxford Movement stood against too much insistence on reason and proof in religious matters, and sought to revive the faith, rituals and dogmas of Roman Catholic religion. It aimed "at the restoration of the poetry, the mystic symbolism, the spiritual power, and the beauty of the architecture, ritual and service which had characterised the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages."\* Just as the Romanticists had infused life into literature by turning their gaze to the Middle Ages, similarly the leaders of this movement—Newman, Keble and Pusey, looked to the past for inspiration, and Newman himself asserted that his movement had owed much to Scott, who turned men's minds in the direction of the Middle Ages.

As the leader of the Oxford Movement Newman repudiated Protestant individualism and bibliolatry, nineteenth-century liberal Christianity, and the eighteenth century deistical argument

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\* Moody Lovett : A History of English Literature.

from design. He upheld devotion, faith, rituals, dogmas in preference to reason and proof, and wrote with vigour in defence of his view point—"After all man is *not* a reasoning animal, he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences, we shall never have done beginning, if we determine to begin with proof."\* In fact, the whole Oxford Movement was a romantic rebellion against the perfunctory, imaginative routine into which the Church of England had fallen, and aimed at the revival of true Roman Catholic faith in an age of machinery.

The Oxford Movement failed to have any influence on the psychological life of the day, and its impact on the growth of literature was not substantial. It could win the allegiance of a few Pre-Raphaelite poets and had some effect on the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

Cardinal Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism became an object of severe criticism and Charles Kingsley charged him of insincerity and duplicity in changing from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, and propagating the Oxford Movement. To vindicate his position as a Roman Catholic and his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, Newman had to come out with a spirited defence in his famous book *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. The whole book is a vigorous reply to Kingsley's charge of wanton dishonesty on the part of Newman in making propaganda in favour of Roman Catholicism. Newman's standpoint is clear and comprehensible. He traces the history of his religious beliefs and comes to the conclusion "that his conversion was only the final step in a course he had been following since boyhood." "As a revelation of a soul's history" says W. J. Long, "and as a model of pure, simple, unaffected English, this book, entirely apart from its doctrinal teaching, deserves a high place in our prose literature." Newman had the better of the argument. His defence is still read while Kingsley's attack is forgotten. Cardinal Newman's other religious works are *Via Media Callista* and the *Grammar of Assent*. They are not of much interest to a student of literature.

More interesting and valuable than the theological writings

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\* Newman : *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

of Newman is his educational and inspiring book *The Idea of University*, which provides to the modern University leaders the basic principles concerning the site of the University, the aim of University education, and the qualifications of the University teachers. The most significant part of the book is mainly concerned with the propagation of the ideals of liberal knowledge and intellectual advancement in University circles. The primary aim of the University in Newman's view is not to prepare students for professional courses, but to impart them liberal education and make them gentlemen and ladies in life. Newman's views are anti-Baconian and he condemns the utilitarian view of education. He is quite clear in his mind that liberal education, "which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no compliments, refuses to be *informed* by any end."\* It can alone bring about the salvation of the intelligensia of the country.

Cardinal Newman employed a classical way of writing in the expression of his thoughts. His prose style is characterised by lucidity, transparency, restraint and balance. Newman's style is indeed, "a beautiful style not beautiful with the rhythmic opulence of Ruskin, nor with the graceful urbanity of Arnold; nor with the fantastic suggestiveness of De Quincey; but beautiful with a limpid lucidity, a chastened eloquence, a gentle persuasiveness."\*\*

The diction employed by Newman has strength, elegance and suppleness. He knows how to make the use of irony in an effective manner. He is also a debater and a polemical writer, capable of driving a nervous and pressing offensive in a rhetorical and oratorical style.

"In the main Newman is a representative of that perfected plain style which has been more than once indicated as the best for all purposes in English. It is in him refined still further by an extra dose of classical and academic correctness, flavoured with quaint though never over-mannered turns of phrase, and shot in every direction with a quintessential individuality, rarely attempting, though never failing when it does attempt, the purely

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\* Newman : *Idea of a University*.

\*\* Arthur Compton Rickett : *A History of English Literature*.

rhetical, but instinct with a strange quiver of religious and poetical spirit."\*

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**Q. 41. Give your estimate of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) as a Critic and as a Prose-Writer.**

**Ans.** Matthew Arnold was not only a great poet but also a great critic and prose writer of the Victorian age. He was a critic of literature as well as a critic of the social, economic and religious life of his times. For Arnold, a critic of literature was inevitably intertwined with social criticism, for criticism is a comprehensive term, its object being to focus attention on all aspects of human life and society. Arnold defined criticism as, "the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy history, art, science to see the object as in itself it really is." Arnold comes before his readers as a critic of society as well as a critic of literature, and in both these fields he sheds a new light and opens new avenues and channels for his followers like T. S. Eliot, Irving Babbit and Paul Elmer More.

**Formative Influences on Matthew Arnold.**

In order to understand the full significance of Arnold's work in criticism it will be necessary to examine the formative influences on his mind and art as a critic of literature and society. The greatest influence on Arnold was undoubtedly that of the classics. He had a great admiration for Greek thought and culture, and burnt incense at the altar of Greek masters in the field of drama, prose, and poetry. He said, "it is time for us to Hellenise and to praise *knowing*, for we have Habraised too much and over valued *doing*". Arnold had a great respect for the 'sanity' of Greek literature, and sought to introduce the simplicity, balance, lucidity, method, and precision of Greek writers in English literature and criticism.

Next to the Greeks, Arnold was influenced by Goethe, the German writer of great eminence and fame during the nineteenth century. He regarded Goethe "as Europe's sagest head, and the physician of the Iron Age." His love of self-culture and discipline of thoughts, was mainly derived from Goethe. From Goethe, Matthew Arnold learnt the importance

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\* George Saintsbury : A Short History of English Literature.



of *objective poetry* and *great action* in poetic composition. Goethe had remarked, "Poetry of the highest type manifests itself as altogether objective, when once it withdraws itself from the external world to become subjective it begins to degenerate. So long as the poet gives utterance merely to his subjective feelings, he has no right to the title." These words of Goethe had a great influence on Matthew Arnold and gave a twist to his insistence on the objective standpoint in the appreciation of poetry.

Among the French masters of art and criticism Arnold was mainly influenced by Sainte-Beuve and Senancour. Arnold had met Sainte-Beuve at Paris in 1859, and ever since that historic meeting the influence of the French critic became palpable in his critical writings. "Sainte-Beuve's influence" says William Robbins, "was mainly in the field of literary criticism, a matter of 'method,' to use Arnold's own word. His tact, his humanistic standards, the objectivity and *curiosity* which made of him a 'naturalist' in literary and other criticism, above all the balance struck with unerring precision these were what Arnold admired and tried to emulate."\* From Sainte-Beuve Arnold learnt the lesson of disinterestedness and detachment in judging a work of art. Arnold's statement that criticism is, "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" is an echo from an essay of Sainte-Beuve where the French master had spoken of the critic's task of introducing, '*Un certain souffle de disintéressement.*' Sainte-Beuve's *Portrait Litteraire* is the structural model for Arnoldian essay in criticism. From Sainte-Beuve Arnold also picked up the necessity of co-relating the biographical details of an artist with his creative work, and judging his creative production in the light of his biographical facts. Sainte-Beuve had stated, "Literature is not for me distinct or at least separable from the rest of man and human organisation; I can taste a work, but it is difficult for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man himself." Arnold accepted this view of the French critic, and his own observations of Romantic poets in *Essays in Criticism* are governed by this

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\* William Robbins : The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold.

principle of judging an author in the light of his life's achievements and endeavours.

Another great Frenchman who left a lasting impression on Arnold's critical thought was Senancour, whose *Obermann* considerably influenced his way of life and thought. Arnold paid him his warm tribute in two long poems *Obermann* and *Obermann Once More*. Arnold was considerably influenced by Senancour's profound inwardness, austere sincerity, the delicate feeling for nature, and the melancholy eloquence of his writings.

Having examined the formative influences on Arnold's critical and literary theories, let us now switch on to an examination of his critical canons--and his critical observations about literary productions.

#### **Arnold's Canons of Criticism.**

The first great principle of criticism enunciated by Arnold is that of *disinterestedness* or detachment which can be practised by 'keeping aloof from what is called the practical view of things.' Disinterestedness on the part of the critic implies freedom from all prejudices, personal or historical. A critic should be impersonal, detached and disinterested. He should be above prejudice, bias and favouritism. He should not favour this or that opinion, this or that form of art, but should judge all works of art and authors from the standard of 'disinterested objectivity.' A critic should not be swayed by personal views and opinions about art, religion, politics, and philosophy. He should keep his 'aloofness', for criticism is a "disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."\*

Disinterestedness then is the first great principle of criticism. The disinterested critic should acquire a store house of knowledge, and "equip himself with the knowledge of the best that has been thought and said in the world." A critic's functions in Arnold's view are threefold "First, there is the critic's duty to learn and understand, he must see things as they really are. Thus equipped his second task is to hand on his ideas to others,

\* Matthew Arnold : Functions of Criticism.

to convert the world to make the best ideas, prevail. His work in this respect is that of a missionary. He is also preparing an atmosphere favourable for the creative genius of the future—promoting a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power.”

Arnold wanted criticism to be lifted from provincialism and limitation of time and space. The critic was a universal figure like a creative artist, and he was as good a mouthpiece of humanity as the literary artist. Criticism should rise above considerations of time, space, politics, and narrow insular feelings. It should be cosmopolitan rather than parochial. “I wish to decide nothing of my own authority” said Arnold, “the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity decide.” This provinciality can be avoided by adopting the *comparative method* of treatment in critical evaluation of a work of art. “The critic must know the best that has been thought and said, both in ancient and in modern times, not only in his own language, but in the languages from which his native literature is derived, and in those which are producing literature concurrently. It is thus, by the comparative method, by seeing how others do, what we also are impelled to attempt that provinciality is avoided.”

Arnold advocated the comparative method rather than historical method for the critic. Criticising the historical method Arnold says, “The method of historical criticism, is the great and famous power in the present day. The advice to study the character of an author and the circumstances in which he has lived, in order to account to oneself for his work, is excellent. But it is a perilous doctrine that from such a study the right understanding of his work will spontaneously issue.” Arnold discarded the grandiose theories of Taine concerning ‘race, milieu, moment,’ and concentrated on the comparative study of great masters of criticism in all ages and climes.

Coming to actual literary composition, Arnold laid emphasis on the principle of suitable *Action* for the drama or poetry. “All depends upon the subject. Choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations : this done, everything else will follow.” In this respect Arnold followed

Aristotle rather than Dryden, for it was the Greek critic who had laid greater emphasis on plot or the fable. Like Aristotle, Arnold also believed that the action should command gravity, seriousness, and sublimity. A work of art wanting in serious action was not a great work, and it was the duty of an artist to choose suitable action for his composition."

Matthew Arnold believed that good action ought to be presented in a good style, the grand style. He had his own views about the grand style. He stated that grand style, "arises in poetry when a noble nature poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject."

Matthew Arnold allied literature to society and stated that, "poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." Poetry in Arnold's views had the noble function of shedding light on the conditions of life and ennoble them by keeping aloft the higher principles of morality and ethical life.

The above stated critical principles of Matthew Arnold have been subjected to a searching examination by Saintsbury in his *History of English Criticism*. He has not accepted all the critical canons of Arnold, and has taken exception to his remarks on the Grand Style and its application of Milton and Shakespeare. Arnold's insistence that poetry is a criticism of life has been considered a commonplace remark because, "all literature is the application of ideas to life: and to say that poetry is the application of ideas to life, under the conditions fixed for poetry, is simply a vain repetition."\*

**Matthew Arnold's chief critical works.**

Arnold's main critical works are on *The Preface To The Poems of 1853*, *On Translating Homer*, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, and *Essays in Criticism*. We will discuss the contents and value of each of them one by one.

**The Preface.**

Arnold made his first appearance as a critic in the *Preface to the poems of 1853*. It was in this preface that Arnold said

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\* George Saintsbury: *A History of English Criticism*.

stress on the importance of the subject—"the great action" | and the study of the ancients. He also elaborated his view of the grand style and its proper handling by the creative artist.

#### **On Translating Homer 1861.**

In this work Arnold, "applies himself to the appreciation of actual literature, and to the giving of reasons for his appreciation, in a way new, delightful and invaluable."\* He defines criticism as, "The endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science to see the object as in itself it really is." The definition of criticism, outlined in this work forms the basis of Arnold's later work and gives a pip to his comprehensive view of criticism. Arnold also presents his views about the grand style in a more emphatic way than he had done earlier in the Preface. He says, "The grand style arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject." The grand style in Arnold's view is applicable only to Homer, Dante, and Milton, and cannot be applied to Shakespeare, Spenser or Shelley. Saintsbury does not agree with Arnold's limitation of the grand style to a few limited poets, and says, "For my part, I will not loose the fragile boat or incur the danger of the roof—speaking in Pickwickian Horatian manner—with any one who denies the grand style to Donne or to Dryden to Spenser or to Shelley. The grand is the transcendent and it is blasphemy against the spirit of poetry to limit the fashions and the conditions of transcendency."\*\*

#### **The Study of Celtic Literature.**

In this book Arnold makes a study of Celtic literature. He finds in this literature, the dominant characteristics of 'melancholy', 'natural magic', and 'vagueness', and he comes to the conclusion that the presence of these qualities in the poetry of the Romantic poets is due to the influence of Celtic literature on them. Arnold's assumptions are not based on facts, for neither Shakespeare nor Keats had the faintest evidence of Celtic blood or Celtic influence. Saintsbury takes Arnold to task for

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\* George Saintsbury: A History of English Criticism.

\*\* Ibid

offering remarks which cannot be proved by actual facts. His criticism of this book is worth quoting, "where melancholy, and natural magic and the vague do strongly and especially, if not exclusively, appear in Celtic poetry, I do not deny, because I do not know ; that Mr. Arnold's evidence is not sufficient to establish their special if not exclusive prevalence, I deny, because I do know. That there is melancholy, natural magic, the vague in Shakespeare and Keats, I admit, because I know ; that Mr. Arnold has any valid argument showing that their presence is due to Celtic influence, I do not admit, because I know that he has produced none. With bricks of ignorance and mortar of assumption you can build no critical house."

### The Essays in Criticism

The two volumes of *Essays in Criticism* (1865-1888) have an important place in Arnold's prose works. The first and second series of essays are, in outlook, all of a piece : they are contrasted only in subject. In the first series Arnold deals with minor authors like Juliet, Maurice and his sister Eugenie de Guerin, or remote authors like Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius and Heine. "The list of names looks like an appeal to intellectual snobbery, and so it is these are not authors any English Critic had tackled before, and they are offered to us now as a cure for intellectual isolationism. With Arnold, indeed, snobbery enters English criticism with a vengeance, and it has never been quite eradicated since."\* In the second and third series he deals with *The Study of Poetry*, *Wordsworth*, *Byron*, *Thomas Gray*, *Keats*, *Milton*, and *Emerson*. Arnold's observations on Wordsworth, Keats, Emerson and Byron have met with general approval, but his denunciation of Shelley as 'an ineffectual angel' has not been accepted by any critic; for the angel is very effectual and provides a tougher criticism of life than Arnold's rejection of life. But all the same the essays in criticism are remarkable intellectual feats, and not to have read them, is not to be in the swim of active intellectual life of the day. "No body after reading *Essays in Criticism*, has any excuse for not being a critic"\* Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*

\* George Watson ; *The Literary Critics*.

\*\* Herbert Paul ; *Matthew Arnold*.

was a landmark in the history of English criticism and prose writing. The book created a stir in the literary world by virtue of its style, the novelty and confidence of its opinions and the wide and curious range of its subjects. It silenced the heresies of popular critics of the day and pierced through the armoury of self-sufficiency and provinciality in criticism.

**Arnold's Social, Political and Theological Criticism.**

Among the works dealing with social, political and theological criticism, the pride of place has to be given to *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). It is a work of supreme importance for the social chronicler of the age. Here Arnold attacks the Barbarians and Philistines of the age for their growing craze for materialism and their disregard for religious and spiritual values. They neither have sweetness nor light which constitute real culture. Arnold pleads for the propagation of culture and intellectual perfection for the attainment of an ideal society.

Among the books dealing with political criticism are *England the Italian Question* (1859), *Mixed Essays* (1879), *Irish Essays* (1882) and *Discoveries in America* (1885),

Among the theological works of Matthew Arnold, special emphasis has to be given to *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). On these religious works we notice Arnold as a critic of religious dogmas and stereotyped theology. He is severely opposed to the dogmatic elements in religion and is a bitter critic of creeds and blind beliefs in religious matters. His *Literature and Dogma* is a masterpiece in this direction, and rudely shakes the mistaken religions of his contemporaries. The value of Arnold's religious criticism lies in the fact that "they face the question of possible disappearance of all existing forms of faith, and the rejection of what is called 'supernaturalism,' and they indicate the belief of the writer that even if theology were swept into the rubbish-heap of forgotten literature, and miracles were universally rejected, what is life-giving and sustaining in religion would still remain."\*

**Arnold's limitations and merits as a critic.**

The study of Arnold's canons of criticism and his main critical works brings out his limitations as well as merits as a critic. Directing first our attention to his limitations, we are reminded of Garrod's remark that Matthew Arnold 'was a man of letters who became a literary critic by accident.' "He was primarily interested in educational, religious and theological subjects, and criticism of literature was a passing phase of his life. I am not sure that it was in his heart to be a literary critic at all. Nor for the most part was Matthew Arnold's public interested in him as a literary critic.\*\* He gave a wider connotation to criticism and submerged literary criticism into the general criticism of society.

Arnold was not a scientific critic. He was more of a moralist and judged every work of art from the moralistic view point. For him a poetry of revolt against moral ideas was a poetry of revolt against life. Modern taste is not in favour of Arnold's moral obsession in critical matters.

Arnold sometimes offered criticism without adequate knowledge on the subject. He built his critical house on the brick of ignorance, and wanted to support it by the mortar of assumption. Prof. Saintsbury has severely taken him to task for his ignorance of Celtic literature in *The Study of Celtic Literature*. He deplores his lamentable ignorance, and considers Arnold unlearned as compared to Johnson, Coleridge.

Arnold failed to practise the principle of disinterestedness in his criticism of English poets. He made a lot of fuss about disinterestedness, but was swayed by personal prejudices, when he came to criticise Chaucer and Shelley. He was dogmatic in his approach particularly in dealing with the Romantics. "Arnold's critical programme of 'a disinterested endeavour' to seek out and advocate the best is not only hopelessly question-begging: it is also hopelessly out of key with Arnold's own achievements. *The Essays in Criticism* and the Biblical reinterpretations are not even remotely disinterested. They are works of passionate partisanship by a skilful, urbane, not always candid controversialist with a zest for opposition.

\*\* H. W. Garrod: *Poetry and Criticism of Life*



Their virtues which are considerable, are essentially polemical. If Arnold had seriously tried to be 'disinterested' his career as a critic would not have happened at all.\* His cult of classicism, or as Saintsbury calls it neo-tato-classicism marred much of his critical writings.

His method of hammering a point was sometimes nauseating. The way in which he 'sells poetry by the pound' in his essay on *The Study of Poetry* is not much appreciated in our times.

Arnold's dislike of the historical method of criticism is not upheld to-day. Outside the nineteenth century, the time factor did not exist for him. His insistence on the comparative method of criticism in preference to the historical method has not been upheld in modern criticism. "*It shows how untypical a Victorian critic he was.*"\*\*

Arnold was guilty of tautology and repetition, incoherence and vacuous statements in his critical observations. Here is a passage from *The Study of Poetry* bringing out the defects of his critical approach pointed above.

"In poetry, as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find its consolation and stay: *But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half sound, true rather than untrue or half true.*"

Does this really mean more than that all things considered, good poems are better than bad poems. Arnold's egoism as a critic stands in the way of his excellence as a critic. He obtrudes his personality in his critical observations and departs from his standard of disinterested objectivity. "His way of writing compels attention, but that attention is directed, not on his object, but on himself and his object together. In the essay on *Amiel* he stands like an unyielding rock washed round by the waves of *Amiel*. His essays are monologues. We cannot imagine him

George Watson : *The Literary Critics.*

\* *ibid.*

employing, as Dryden did, the dialogue form. Arnold's egotism accounts for the high-pitched conversational tone, the ripple of inspired extemporisation. It all makes away from criticism because you cannot show off and be disinterested at the same time."\*

Matthew Arnold has also been charged with snobbery and false display of learning. "With Arnold indeed, snobbery enters English criticism with a vengeance and it has never been quite eradicated since."\*\*

"There seems no good reason now for accepting Arnold's claims to greatness as a critic. Those who see in Arnold's essay evidence of a major critical intelligence should set themselves to consider, the following objections. Where first in the entire Corpus of Arnold's criticism, do we see the 'great critical effort' at work upon any English text—upon a single play of Shakespeare or poem of Milton, Wordsworth or Keats?"\*\*\*

In the foregoing pages we have pin-pointed the shortcomings and defects of Mathew Arnold's criticism. The defects need not detract from his merits as a critic. He was indeed a colossus in the history of English criticism. Before Arnold English criticism was in a state of chaos. It was Arnold who gave coherence and system, and taught people how to criticise books and authors. "Criticism in England' might be said to have started and ended with Matthew Arnold; before him there was a chaos after him a multitudinous sea."†

What were the positive services rendered by Matthew Arnold to English Criticism. Saintsbury, the severe critic of Arnold, has to recognise the merits and services of Arnold as a critic in the following lines taken from his *A History of English Criticism*.

"His services, therefore, to English Criticism, whether as a 'preceptist' as or an actual craftsman cannot possibly be overestimated. In the first respect, he was, if not the absolute

\* Tillotson : Criticism and the Nineteenth Century.

\*\* George Watson : The Literary Critics.

\*\*\* Ibid.

† Philip M. Jones : Introduction to Twentieth Century Critical Essays (World Classics).

reformer, the leader in reform, of the slovenly and disorganised condition into which Romantic criticism had fallen. In the second, the things which he had not, as well as those which he had, combined to give him a place among the very first. He had not the sublime and ever new inspired inconsistency of Dryden. Dryden, in Mr. Arnold's place, might have begun by cursing Shelley a little, but would have ended by blessing him all but wholly. He had not the robustness of Johnson, the supreme critical 'reason' of Coleridge; scarcely the exquisite, if fitful, appreciation of Lamb, or the full-blooded and passionate appreciation of Hazlitt. But he had an exacter knowledge than Dryden's; the fineness of his judgment shows finer beside Johnson's bluntness, he could not wool-gather like Coleridge; his range was far wider than Lamb's; his scholarship and his delicacy alike gave him an advantage over Hazlitt. Systematic without being hidebound, well read (if not exactly learned) without pedantry; delicate and subtle without weakness or dilettantism; Catholic without eclecticism; enthusiastic without indiscriminateness,—Mr. Arnold is one of the best and most precious of teachers on his own side. And when at those moments which are, but should not be, rare, the Goddess of Criticism descends Like Cambwa and her lion team into the lists, and with her Nepean the makes man forget sides and sects in common love of literature, then he is one of the best and most precious of critics."

"No English or American critic since Coleridge has had a more extensive influence than Mr. Arnold. For his influence has operated in at least three ways. He was, in one sense, something of a spokesman for nineteenth-century poetic taste. Secondly, through Arnold, more cosmopolitan ideas became readily accessible to English speaking critics and readers. After becoming current, these have passed unobtrusively into much of the criticism of the past forty years, including that which now looks on Arnold himself is either academically ineffectual or else as an evil spirit representing, "romantic tastes" in style. Lastly much of the modern defence of the central educational value of literature rests—where the defence is impressive—on classical

premises resurrected and popularized, however vaguely and sketchily by Arnold.”\*

#### **Arnold's Prose Style.**

Matthew Arnold's prose style was considerably influenced by the example of French masters of prose like Sainte-Beuve and Renan, and it was his endeavour to introduce the same method, precision, proportion and arrangement in his prose writings as was found in the works of the French writers. Arnold succeeded in his mission, and his prose style is characterised by all those qualities dear to a classical writer of English prose. Arnold was considerably influenced by the example of Addison and Steele, and it was his effort to make English prose free from the vices of the provincial, Corinthian, and the Asiatic styles of Newman, Macaulay, and Kingslake.

Arnold's prose is mainly characterised by lucidity and clarity. He is clear and precise in his expression. His prose is transparent and crystal clear like a limpid stream. Suavity and serenity are the other hallmarks of his style. He is never loud or violent, and rarely allows himself to be swept away by the gush of powerful rhetoric.

Arnold's prose bears the stamp of his poetic afflatus, and his sentences are coloured by his poetic feelings. "It would do wrong" says Oliver Elton "to Matthew Arnold to sever his prose which is often that of a poet, from his verse into which the thought and temper of his prose continually find their way." His criticism of Shelley as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void in vain" exhibits his poetic way of exposing Shelley's idealism. But generally speaking we do not come across a super abundance of polyphonic words in his prose writings, and he has no special flair for rhythmic and musical words like Pater and Symonds. His is not 'a beaded style whose thoughts are lost in its garniture'. It has glitter and gusto, but not an exuberance of these qualities. Arnold's symmetry and proportion have a greater appeal to us than his poetic touches. His sentence construction is based on the Greek and Latin principles of balance, and proportion,

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\* Walter Jackson Bates : Matthew Arnold. (From Criticism : The Major Texts).

harmony, precision and symmetry.

"Arnold was a propagandist for culture, and in his propagandist books and essays he developed a style admirably suited to his purposes. He projects his own temper of sweet reasonableness by a variety of artful devices, and at the same time, by his ingenious use of pet terms and phrases deliberately repeated in different contexts, he can express irony, contempt, impatience or schoolmasterly reproof. He is brilliant in his handling of personalities, succeeding in giving a tone of hectoring unreason to his opponents by the way he quotes them and the use he makes of his quotations. He can make his opponents appear ridiculous by gently but firmly repeating and repeating their remarks in a perfectly controlled context of ever-growing irony, until in the end even the courtesy with which he invariably treats them becomes a device for destroying them. He can build up the mood until even his thoroughly polite mentioning of the proper name of an opponent makes the man appear silly. He has nothing of Carlyle's prophetic violence or Ruskin's poetic eloquence; his quieter rhetoric has spoken more cogently to later generations."\*

Arnold's prose style is sometimes boring particularly when he repeats his point, in different forms, and obtrudes his personality in an egotistical manner. Rightly Herbert Paul points out that "it would have been well if Arnold had applied the critical pruning knife to the exuberant mannerisms which sometimes disfigure his style."\*\*

**Q. 42. Give your estimate of Walter Horatio Pater (1839-1894) as a critic and prose writer of the Victorian Age.**

**Ans.** Walter Pater was one of the greatest critics and prose writers of the Victorian Age. He was at heart a lover of art, beauty, and melody, and belonged to the aesthetic movement sponsored and spearheaded by the Pre-Raphaelite poets. Art for Art's sake was Walter Pater's ideal, and all his prose works and works of criticism are saturated with the spirit of aestheticism. He carried forward the style and message of Flaubert, the French

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II

\*\* Herbert Paul : Matthew Arnold.

critic and artist, in his literary and critical works and laid emphasis on the glorification of art for its own sake. He brought the *subjective* and the *impressionistic* method into full play in his works, and gave an artistic touch to every thought he expressed in his poetic style.

#### **Pater's Works**

Walter Pater began his literary career by contributing an essay on Coleridge to a magazine in 1856. His approach to Coleridge was much appreciated and the author was inspired by public acclamation to produce works of art and criticism. Pater's first volume was *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). In approaching the Renaissance Pater did not set out to do the works of the excavator or the professional critic. He did not present the whole story of the Renaissance but concentrated his attention on the evaluation of the works of artists like Leonardo de Vinci, Sandro Batticelli and Du-Bellay. He meditated with conscious artfulness over Renaissance art and life in an endeavour to illustrate and implement his view that, "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's objects as it really is, is to know one's own impressions as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly."

In 1885, Arnold produced a long novel *Marius the Epicurean*. The story of this novel is set in the second century A.D. in the age of the Antonines. Marius, a young Roman lad is first brought up in the old Roman religion as it lingered on in country places, and then later on he embraces the new Christianity, and cultivates a few Christian friendships. He sacrifices his life for the sake of a Christian friend and presents an ideal of heroic self sacrifice. Through Marius, Pater seeks to "spiritualise the search for pleasure as far as sacrifice pure and simple."

"Slowly moving, interlarded with philosophic meditations and discussions, with Latin and Greek phrases woven at intervals into the elaborate English prose, inset Socratic dialogues, carefully wrought reconstructions of places and atmospheres, a retelling of the story of Cupid and Psyche, and continual echoes of late Roman lyric poetry, and of both pagan and early Christian liturgical literature, the book almost sinks under its own weight. If read as a novel it would indeed sink, but it

remains afloat as an extended exploration of the relation between art, religion, philosophy and experience and how this relation can affect the sensibility.”\*

#### **Imaginary Portraits (1887).**

In *Imaginary Portraits* Pater introduces four characters drawn from different countries and climes. *A Prince of Court Painters* is the story of Antony Watteau, the famous French painter; *Sebastian Van Storck* is the picture of young Hollander, *Duke Carl of Rosemold* is a young German nobleman; *Apollo in Picardy* reveals a new aspect of Pater's character. To these portraits are added two stories *Emerald Uthwart* and *The Child in the House*. They are marked with a wistful charm, and haunting melody.

In 1889 Pater produced his masterpiece *Appreciations*, a volume containing his views about Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Sir Thomas Browne, and D. G. Rossetti, with the opening essay on *Style* wherein Pater expounds his views on style and the search for the exact and precise word in the expression of the ‘sense of fact’ after the example and practice of Flaubert, the French artist. His criticism is generally discursive, interspersed with biographical and general comments and with philosophical observations as when he breaks into his discussion of Coleridge to defend “the relative spirit” against the tendency “to turn the relative spirit, by its constant dwelling on the more fugitive conditions or circumstances of things, breaking through a thousand rough and brutal classifications, and giving elasticity to inflexible principles.”

Pater's interest in classical studies was well reflected in *Plato and Platonism* (1889) and *Greek Studies* (1895). His last work is *Goston de Labour*. It is an unfinished romance concerning his own life.

In all these literary and critical works the stamp of Pater's personality can be palpably felt by the reader. “The mirror which Pater holds upto nature is one which can reflect only himself. There is nothing in the last degree objective in his work; it is

• David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume 11.

hardly too much to say that the whole of it, whether intentionally or not is autobiographic ”\*

### **Walter Pater as a Critic.**

Walter Pater was an important English critic of the last generation of the nineteenth century, and he stood to the generation in a relation resembling those of Coleridge to the first and Arnold to the latter part of the second. He did not belong to the category of formal and professional critics and whatever literary criticism flowed from his pen was more in the nature of subjective appreciation of a literary work than a judgment on it from an objective standpoint. Aldington is very much to the point when he states in the introduction to the selected works of Walter Pater that, “fundamentally Pater was neither Prose-Poet nor critic, but something in between the two, with the critic or at any rate the man of letters predominating.”

As a critic, it was Pater's object to bring about the fusion of classical and romantic qualities and cultivate the virtues of both in a manner harmonious, without betraying any discordance in their union. He was gifted with a penetrating insight and he could discover the romantic qualities and aspects of classical life and art, and the classical elements in romantic periods. He had a particular liking for the Renaissance period because it presented a meeting-point of the classical and the romantic spirit. For Pater romanticism centred in ‘curiosity and a love of beauty’, and classicism in a ‘comely order.’ It was Pater's job as a critic to harmonise these two currents, and this he admirably does in his essay on Romantic and Classic elements in literature. “The true function of Pater is to make the romantic ones more classical, to superimpose the comely order upon beauty, and in doing so inevitably to reduce the strangeness. This he does almost in spite of himself, and yet with the approval of his own judgment.”\*\*

As a critic, Pater adopted the subjective or the impressionistic method, which was poles apart from Matthew Arnold's disinterested pursuit of literature and objective standpoint in approaching a work of art. Pater's *Appreciations* are primarily

**Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.**

\* Ibid.



from the subjective standpoint and he records his own impressions of their work. "Pater's critical writing then must be regarded mainly as a series of impressions; and if we were to call it impressionist criticism the suggested parallel with impressionist painting would not be wholly inapt. In both there is the formal allegiance to science, but behind it an essentially lyric mood the same neglect of structure and definition in pursuit of delicate evanescent effects that are felt to be more real and more important became more immediate."\* Pater is at his best in judging poets and artists who shared his own introspective aesthetic and brooding nature. Browne and Coleridge are given a fair treatment for they were to his liking.

If Pater had chosen to write on Keats he would have produced a nice critical essay on Keats, the romantic lover of beauty and art belonged to his own class and school. Pater would not have succeeded in his criticism of a genius of the free and objective type like Shakespeare. At best Pater is a subjective artist and critic and his method is that of impressionism which Lamb and Hazlitt had brilliantly illuminated.

Pater's interest as a critic was not limited merely to the evaluation of authors, but also to their styles. He was as critical of thought as the style in which the thought was couched. He was sensitive to the colour and gradation of shade in words, and, "there is an amazing delicacy and subtlety in the critical nuances by which he endeavoured to actualise for the reader the object of his criticism. Only one has to read the Essays on Lamb and Rossetti to appreciate."\*\* Pater's advice to literary artists as regards the use of proper style was, "say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, with no surplusage—there is the justification of the sentence so fortunately born, 'entire, smooth and round', that it needs no punctuation, and also (that is the point) of the most elaborate period if it be light in its elaboration."†

As a critic of Art, Pater placed music on a much higher pedestal than other fine arts. In one of his essays he pleads

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\* Graham Hough : *The Last Romantics*.

• Compton—Rickett : *A History of English Literature*.

† Pater's *Essay on Style*.

ferently for music for here is a fusion of sound and sense, and for him architecture and sculpture are but harmonies and rhythm in stone—music stately expressed. For Pater the ideal is complete union of form and content,<sup>7</sup> and this is best achieved in music. That is the reason why he holds music in high esteem and regards it as the finest of the fine arts. In this respect Pater's own words are characteristic—"If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere of all good art."

Pater makes a difference between good art and great art in his essay on style. Good art is not necessarily great art, for great art must also have something impressive in "the quality of the matter it informs or controls." It is on this, on "its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of the literary art depends."

Pater's criticism suffers from certain drawbacks. His egoism and subjectivism sometime become nauseating. He lacks a definite four-square originality, and fresh air. "The want of fresh air is the great deficiency in Walter Pater, and a source of the discomfort which he causes to most readers unless they are like himself."\*

In spite of the few defects in Pater's criticism, "he is our greatest critic since Coleridge. He left behind him a little creative writing, and sheaf of what he called Appreciations. Time has little dulled or worn that fabric; it is dyed too fast. What Pater may have lost by his esoteric and not wholly healthy habit of mind, and his indifference to the broad energies of mankind, he more than recovers by his delicacy of sense and his unimpeded concentration. His influence stole out from a narrow circle. It has never reached the larger public, but it has never retreated."\*\*

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\* Oliver Elton : A Survey of English Literature.

\*\* Ibid.

**Pater's Prose Style.**

Pater's views on Style are embodied in his essay *On Style* the opening essay in his book *Appreciations*. Pater laid emphasis on colour, music, and harmony in the expression of thought. He advocated a consciously artistic prose where all superfluities should be eliminated and where the words should be chosen with jealous and loving care, so as to express clearly and precisely the underlying thoughts.

True to what he championed, Pater cultivated a prose style full of colour and melody, marked with ornateness and exquisite polish. "His prose is a skilful music, nervous like that of recent composers, blending the more distant elements of nature and the soul into a harmony."

In Pater's prose we hear echoes of Charles Lamb, De Quincey, Newman, and Ruskin. He was akin to Charles Lamb in the delicacy of touch and the subtle flavour of language. He had a certain nearness to De Quincey in the impassioned autobiographical tendency and a fondness for retrospect and speculative fancy. He was very much in the line of Newman in respect of the restraint, the economy of effect, and the perfect suavity of his work. We have in Pater the suggestiveness of Ruskin, though he often parted company with the great Victorian artist and turned aside in the direction of repression rather than volubility, of severity rather than prodigality.

"The essence of his attempt was to produce prose that has never before been contemplated in English, full of colour and melody, serious, exquisite, ornate. He devoted equal pains both to construction and ornamentation. His object was that every sentence should be weighed, charged with music, haunted with echoes: that it should charm and suggest rather than convince or state. The triumph of his art is to be metrical without metre, rhythmical without monotony. There will, of course, always be those whom this honeyed, laboured cadence will affect painfully with a sense of something stifling and over-perfumed. But to such as can apprehend, feel enjoy, there is the pleasure of perfected art of language, of calculated effect, of realisation with a supreme felicity of the intention of the writer."\*

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\* A. C. Benson : Walter Pater.

What is after all the effect of all this highly wrought prose of Walter Pater? The impression it leaves upon us is one of decadence. His prose is not for daily use. "The high wrought English of Pater is indeed beautiful, but the beauty is artificial and the sense it leaves is not a sense of happiness."\*

"It is the fashion now to look down on Pater and to abominate his prose; but his interpretation of his criticism has illuminating moments, and if his prose is languorous, it is with the languor of an athlete at rest. He is the conscious prose-artist of the period; he had a good ear, and a respect for words, and though he is not a model to be followed, there is much to be learnt from him." In his prose works we hear echoes of "inexhaustible discontent, languor, and homesickness, the chords of which ring all through our modern literature."

**Q. 43. In what ways does Walter Pater stand distinguished from Matthew Arnold as a critic of art, literature and society?**

**Ans.** Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater were the great critics of the later nineteenth century. They were stalwarts of criticism, but differed in their aims and objectives as critics of art, literature and society.

Matthew Arnold took a comprehensive view of criticism, and included in it not only the criticism of literature and art, but also the criticism of society. In his opinion criticism is an endeavour, in all branches of knowledge—*theology, philosophy, history, art, science* to see the object as in itself it really is. He advocated 'disinterested objectivity' in approaching a work of art and literature. He favoured detachment and aloofness on the part of the critic. It was the duty of the critic to examine works of art from an objective standpoint without bringing in the critic's own personality in the judgment. This is what should mean by disinterested pursuit on the part of the critic.

Walter Pater upheld a narrow view of criticism. He confined criticism to art and literature, rather than to all other vital concerns of society. His view of criticism is limited in its

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\* Hugh Walker : *The English Essay and Essayists.*

scope. Further Pater upheld the subjective approach to a work of art and literature. In his opinion criticism of literature and art was a matter of impressionism and analysis. It was the critic's job to examine the work of an artist from the subjective standpoint. The critic was required to record one's sense of fact as distinguished from mere fact itself.

The difference between Arnold's and Pater's theories, therefore, is very clear and evident. Whereas Pater believed in subjective interpretation of a work of art, Matthew Arnold considered this subjective interpretation as suicidal and fatal to 'the dispassionate consideration of a work of art'. He was against all caprice, waywardness, and whimsicality on the part of the critic. He was above *individuality* and *provinciality* and maintained cosmopolitanism in critical evaluations. To him 'the personal element was of little justification in any critical estimate'. He said, "the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way and let humanity decide" Walter Pater had no sympathy with such an objective standpoint in criticism, and his *Appreciations* completely disapprove of Arnold's insistence on objectivity and disinterested approach to a poet or an artist. To Pater individual impressions count a lot in judging a work of art. He directs our attention to the way a critic should judge a piece of art : "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or book to me ? What effect does it really produce on me ? Does it give me pleasure ? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure ? All this means that a piece of art should be judged subjectively." "To Arnold the object lay in the external world sharply clear to for anybody, who had not blinded himself with insular or provincial zeal, for Pater it had no existence save among the thoughts it had stimulated." For Pater the necessary preliminary is to know one's own impression as it really is, rather than worry about the object as in itself it really is.

Arnold discarded the historical method of approaching a work of art. He ignored the importance and validity of the age and the time in which the poet lived. To him historical approach was futile, for a work of art was to be judged not by the standards of the time in which it was produced, but from the

standards which had been laid down by the great master in all ages and climes. Arnold attached no importance to personal or historical background.

Pater, in this respect, stands contrasted with Matthew Arnold. He laid emphasis on the historical aspect of criticism and was well aware of the significance of the broader historical perspective. He took into account the age and the circumstances in which a work of art was produced.

Matthew Arnold upheld the moralistic approach to poetry and art. He considered that a poetry of revolt against moral ideas was a poetry of revolt against life, and a poetry of thoughtful considerations and good moral action was something to be prized in life. Walter Pater disapproved of the moralistic stand in judging poets and artists, and laid stress on the aesthetic way of judging an author.

Arnold's judgments are dogmatic and expressed in a style that is precise and exact. His critical style is based on the great ideal of balance and sanity. It lacks artistic beauty and exhilaration of spirit. Pater's style of criticism is artistic, melodic and picturesque. His manner is poetic, and he sways us by his artistic style.

On the whole Arnold's position as a critic is sounder than Pater's. "Pater's remarks are for the most part capricious, always highly personal and therefore, unacceptable to a great majority of scholars. They are very often unprincipled, and lack solidity and definiteness. He is less weighty, less sound, less principled, and less authoritative than Arnold." He represents more than Coleridge "that inexhaustible discontent, languor, and homesickness.....the chords of which ring all through our modern literature."

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**Q. 44** What is the significance of the work of John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde in the aesthetic movement of the Victorian Age ?

**Ans.** John Addington Symonds (1840-1893).

Symonds is an important member of the decadent school. He is known by his *The Renaissance Of Italy* and *Shakespeare's*

*Predecessors in the English Drama.* He is inferior to Pater both as a critic and as a stylist. His style is florid and flowery and is marred by verbose prolixity. "As a stylist he is attractive and picturesque, but overornate, and his diffuseness and lack of method compare unfavourably with Pater's concentrative lucidity."\*

**Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).**

Wilde upheld the theory of 'Art for Art's sake,' and carried forward the aesthetic movement to its culminating point, throwing morality out of view altogether. For Wilde, Art had no other aim save to gratify the taste of the artist. It had no bearing on social problems. It had no relation with morality. "The basis of Ruskin's aestheticism is ethical; Wilde adopted the aestheticism, but eliminated the moral."\*\* The artist lived in a world of his own creating pictures of beauty and love for his own delight.

Wilde tried his hand at several kinds of writing characterised by wit and display of cleverness. He wrote poems having no originality about them. In his verses, graceful, scholarly, melodious, we find an imitative artist, who successfully catches echoes of Hood, Tennyson, Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne, without sounding any note of his own. "The bulk of his verse is over-wrought" says Hugh Walker, "and we tire of it, and long for something less sophisticated."

Wilde wrote a number of comedies in the manner of the artificial comedy of manners of the Restoration Age. *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893) is a miracle of wit; *A Woman of no Importance* and *The Importance of being Earnest* (1899) are monuments of almost exhaustless ingenuity and resource. "They are trivial comedies for serious people." In *Salome*, the cruelty of sensual passion is studied in a realistic manner. It is delicately shaded. The reader will find these comedies extremely light, replete with the lightest banter and wildest paradox. "His comedies have a rapid and brilliant animation; their dialogue shows the easy flow of the traditional French manner; the plots are cleverly wrought; the comic characters, mere sketches, most of them lay on claim to depth. The display of wit and verbal fencing which go beyond life, and at times overreach themselves in a sort of enthusiasm, would remind one of Congreve, were it not

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\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature,

\*\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

that undercurrent of bitter self-consciousness which is felt behind the mirth of their fanciful irony."

The *Picture of Dorian Gray* is a beautiful novel in which Wilde puts the best of his aestheticism. The entire work seethes with a passionate yearning for youth and beauty. A complete picture of Wilde's dilettantism is to be found in the two characters of Lord Henry and Dorian Gray. Here, besides presenting the aesthetic delight for beauty, Wilde sows seeds of antidote to his own thesis of hedonism, by depicting the inner ruin brought about by the stubborn quest for pleasure. "Filled as it is with the influence of French decadentism the book is strongly conceived, and written in a very studied style. It is, moreover, whether willingly, or unwillingly as sincere as it was in Wilde to be"

Wilde's critical work is to be found in *Intentions* (1891). It is "a monument of sane and subtle criticism, expressed with admirable ease and pungency."

Two works of Wilde—*The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) and *De Profundis* published after his death in (1905), are works of a different character. Wilde, who had been imprisoned for two years on charges of grave immorality, wrote them in changed environment. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* is appallingly real. *De Profundis* composed in jail is Wilde's most touching and pathetic utterance written in the prison. It is a long cry of the soul in agony. It is marked not with pose or affliction, but with perfect sincerity. His greatest literary bequest, *De Profundis* moves us by its deep note of pathos.

Wilde's prose style in *Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis* is that of an artist, and every line has the stamp of beauty, grace and loveliness about it. The prose style in *De Profundis* scales higher heights of success, and the poetic touches that bedeck it have the quality of moving us to tears. The work abounds in utterances welling out from the poet's heart, and every sentence bears the burden of an agony that Wilde had experienced during days of grief in the prison.

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**Q. 45. Give your estimate of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) as an Essayist of the Victorian Age.**

**Ans.** Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was a man of versatile genius. He was a novelist, an essayist, a poet, a short story writer and a critic. He could make his mark in every field though it is principally as a novelist in the romantic form and as an essayist, that he is best remembered. Here we will deal with Stevenson as an Essayist.

Stevenson's fame to-day mostly rests on his essays contained in *Virginibus Puerisque, Familiar Studies of Men and Books, Travels with a Donkey*—"Essentially a collection of essays wrought into a whole." Since Lamb there has been no more accomplished essayist than Stevenson. Nature made him an essayist, and he co-operated with nature, developing and strengthening the gifts with which he was endowed at birth."\*

The essays of Stevenson cover a wide range of subjects. They are a reflection of the author's reaction to the objects of his study, and embody his views and opinions about a variety of subjects. Literature, Nature, Science, child life, common human life, religion, philosophy, morality form subjects for essay and constitute the warp and woof of the essayist's gamut. The familiar essays of Stevenson are, *Books that have influenced me, Pan's Pipe, Child's Play, Beggars, An Apology for Idlers, Christmas Sermons, Pulvis at Umbra, El Dorado, From a College Window* etc.

The essays of Stevenson are delightful and entertaining, marked with touches of humour, irony and satire. They are embroidered with a delicate fancy. They exhibit his playfulness and zest of life.

What impresses us most in the essays of Stevenson is their moralising tone. He was a moralist and preached lessons of virtue and good moral life. Henley's "something of the shorter catechist" is an under statement. The 'hum of metaphysics' is always about Stevenson. "There was not merely something but a great deal of the shorter catechist in Stevenson; fundamentally, if we take the phrase in a generous sense, there was little else."\*\* "Stevenson's

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\* Hugh Walker : The English Essay and Essayists.

\*\* Ibid.

philosophy limits itself to man, and in the great majority it is ethical in its nature."

Heroism and optimism signalise Stevenson's essays. An invalid all his life, Stevenson did not allow his spirits to be damped by thoughts of pessimism. In one of his essays we find the essayist voicing forth his determination to live well and with loveliness and animation. "It is better," he says, "to lose health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it, than to die daily in the sick room."

Stevenson's primary interest was in man rather than Nature or study of works of literature. This explains why the critical portion is not prominent in his essays. His criticism of Thoreau, Walt Whitman is not satisfactory. But his representation of human character as in the essay on 'Beggars' is particularly sincere and real.

Stevenson's essays are intensely subjective. The essayist himself forms the hub of his writings revealing his likings and dislikings and chatting with the reader in a familiar way. "In their essential subjectivity, these essays bear some distant resemblance to those of Charles Lamb; less artistically wrought, less richly loaded with intentions, they make, as Elia had done, the writer's personality the very centre of his work." (Cazamian)

Stevenson's style in his essays is laboured. It was a style that he picked up by playing a 'sedulous ape' to great masters of literature. There are echoes of Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey in his essays. But he succeeded in assimilating them in a mould that became his own. Despite his obvious indebtedness to greater writers, there is an individual flavour about Stevenson's work, the flavour of an attractive personality. He cultivated writing as a craft. His skill in words concentrated itself in a sentence or phrase or even in a word. "He devoted very attentive care to the art of writing. He knew the anxious quest of the exact word, the search for a cadence, at the same time harmonious and not too markedly regular. His style is sufficiently nervous to bear such conscious filing and refining. It draws its strength from a very varied and supple vocabulary, in which the whole scale of learned shades meets with the most racy vein—popular, technical or dialectical words. At times the exquisiteness of the form seems to

exceed the just demands of the matter, and this is the single weakness of that prose."\*

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**Q. 46. Briefly examine the works of the Historians, Biographers, Scientists and Philosophers of the Victorian Age.**

**Ans. Historians of the Victorian Age.**

We have already dealt with the work of Macaulay as an historian. Let us now take into account the works of other prominent historians of the Victorian Age.

**James Anthony Froude (1818-94).**

Froude is undoubtedly the most brilliant of the Romantic school of historians. His miscellaneous work was published in four volumes called *Short Studies On Great Subjects* (1867-85). His *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth* (1856-70) was issued in twelve volumes. His other books are *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (1872-74), *Caesar* (1879), *Oceana or England and her Colonies* (1886), and Irish novel *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy* (1889) and his controversial *Biography of Carlyle*.

Froude has provided us interesting glimpses of Elizabethan life and historical characters like Henry VIII and Wolsey, Anne Boylene and Queen Elizabeth. He has made the Elizabethan period live, and has revitalised the old Tudor life of the sixteenth century. His descriptions are wonderfully vivid and graphic and his insight into human character is deep and profound. His literary style is highly colourful. It is beautiful. "It is at once strong and restrained, simple and sumptuous. His periods glow with a subdued and chastened richness. In place of the showy but metallic brilliance of Macaulay, we have a delicately plastic and exquisitely modulated style. It is less mannered than Arnold's less artificial than De Quincey's, less florid than Ruskin's."\*

**Alexander William Kinglake (1809-91)**

His *The Invasion of the Crimea* (1863-87) is a bulky work rich in details. *Eothen* provides an account of his Eastern travel. His style is tawdry though he captures us by his picturesque

Legouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature.

\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

narrative.

**John Richard Green (1837-83)**

Greene's '*A Short History of the English People*' is concerned with history of the people and rarely does the historian make excursions in the field of wars and high politics. *The Making of England* (1881) and *The Conquest of England* (1883) are his other full-length historical works.

Green has the art of making his pages live. He is graphic in his treatment of history and is akin to Macaulay and Froude in his faculty for dramatising history though he is more humanistic than either of them. "To Green, the springs of our national life lay in the history of the people at large. With his sensitive and poetic imagination he makes everything live: a date, a fragmentary record, a dull city Charter; he touches them with the same vital significance which Ruskin accorded to economic facts."\*

**Edward Augustus Freeman (1823-92)**

He wrote many works of history of which *The History of the Norman Conquest of England* and *The Reign of William Rufus and the Accession of Henry the First* (1882) are significant. "Freeman specialized in certain periods of English history, which he treated laboriously and at great length. This, as well as his arid style, makes his history unattractive to read but he did much solid and enthusiastic work for the benefit of his students and successors" (Albert).

**William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859).**

His best works are *The History of Ferdinand and Isabella* (1836), *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) and *The History of the Conquest of Peru* (1847). His manner of narration is plain and simple, and his art is different from Macaulay and Froude.

Beside these historians there were many others of lesser significance. Connop Thirlwall (1797-1875) wrote the *History of Greece* (1835-47). "It was a solid column of learning, crowned by the lily-work of an attractive style."

George Grote (1794-1841) wrote the *History of Greece* in

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\* Compton-Bickett : A History of English Literature.

which he eulogised Athenian democracy like an idolator. Thomas Arnold, wrote the *History of Rome*. Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868) wrote the *History of Jews* and considered them a 'chosen race.' William Stubbs (1825-1901) came out with *The Constitutional History of England*. Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-1862) penned *The History of Civilization* in two volumes. Buckle differed from Carlyle in not giving importance to individual heroes. He held that, "in the great march of human affairs, individual peculiarities count for nothing." "Society was conditioned by the laws of its environment." Buckle made the way for the scientific treatment of sociological problems. John Robert Seeley (1834-1895) is famous for *Expansion of England* (1883) and *Growth of British Policy* (1895). He adopted the comparative method and showed the interrelation between national and foreign politics. Edward Hartpole Lecky (1838-1903) became popular by his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* and *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869). The reader will find in Lecky "a cool and reasonable debater, slave to no theory—in short, an almost ideal political philosopher." Lord Acton (1834-1902) was a scholar of great learning and wrote *The History of Europe*. His outlook on historical phenomena was ethical, and he was interested in the moral problems raised by history.

#### **Biographers of the Victorian Age.**

Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Bronte* is a brilliant biography. It is noted for its sympathy, insight and tact. Mrs. Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving* exhibits the author's skill in visualising character and portraying it with sympathy. John Forster's biographies of *Goldsmith*, *Swift*, *Lamb* and *Dickens* are quite significant. He gives enough matter but does not vitalise it with a lively spark of genius. Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay* is a much better work than Forster's. The biographer exhibits a 'real sense of perspective as well as a lucid and cultured pen.' Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas, Holland Rose, Lord Morley, James Gairdner are other important biographers of the age.

#### **Scientists in the Victorian Age.**

Among the scientists of the Victorian Age, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spenser and Thomas Henry Huxley deserve attention.

**Charles Robert Darwin.** (1809-82)

The chief works of Darwin are *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), *On the Origin of Species* (1859), *The Descent of Man* (1871). He propounded the theory of Evolution which revolutionised the thought of the age. *The Origin of Species* proved to be an epoch-making book. It transformed the conceptions of the people regarding natural history and changed man's way of thinking on the problems of human society. His book is masterly in the exposition of facts and proving their validity by argument. The sober flow of his prose hardly betrays the slightest tremor of emotion. There is no art here but honesty.

**Herbert Spenser** (1820-1903).

"Spenser stands in a pronounced contrast to Darwin. He is more of the philosopher than the scientist; or at least; he is more attracted to the process of generalising than to the long and meticulous research which leads upto it. He is more skilled in the handling of abstract ideas, and at the same time more able to adapt his thoughts to the embellishment of form. He has been charged with verbosity and pedantry, but the fault is to be found in the matter rather than in the style. He says what he wishes to say without any undue expense of language; and his lighter writings, as, for example, his articles on education, afford pleasant reading." \* His main works are *Principles of Biology* (1864-1867), *New Principles of Psychology* (1870-72), *Principles of Sociology* (1876-96), *Principles of Ethics* (1879-93), *Education* (1861), *Autobiography* (1904).

**Thomas Henry Huxley** (1825-1892).

Henry Huxley—'Darwin's Bull Dog'—wrote *Essays on Controverted Subjects*, and popularised Darwin's theory of Evolution. He attacked religion. For him "scepticism is the highest of duties, of blind faith one unpardonable sin." He was the "embodiment of the scientific conscience and reflects the buoyancy and enthusiasm which characterised the flowers of Darwin." His work is characterised by passionate integrity and idealism. His style is trenchant and forceful. "He is assertive and assured, merciless in exposing the weaknesses of his opponents. In thought and style he is as completely representative of the

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\* Legouis and Cazamian : *A History of English Literature*.

values of knowing, as is Carlyle of those of conduct, and Arnold of beauty of life.”\* “He had a fine, lucid, literary style, a natural aptitude for dialectics, and an impatience with the cautious peradventures and hair-splitting logic dear to many theologians.”\*\*

**Philosophers of the Victorian Age.**

John Stuart Mill was a philosopher, political thinker and an economist of repute. As a political philosopher he defended liberty. His sympathies were with the working classes. His main works in the field of politics are *On Liberty* and *Representative Government*. In philosophy he advocated the doctrine of utilitarianism laying stress on the greatest good of the greatest number.

Alexander Bain and Henry Sidwick accepted the utilitarian standpoint to a great extent. James Martineau was another remarkable philosopher with an ethical bent. Edward Caird formulated the Hegelian philosophy with a literary flourish. Philosophical thought advanced with the same rapidity as the scientific thought of the Age.



\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

\*\* A Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature

# **THE VICTORIAN NOVEL**

## **(THE EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS)**

**Q. 47. What are the main features of the early Victorian novel and novelists ?**

**Ans.** The Victorian age is essentially the age of the novel. During this period novel made a phenomenal progress. "This was partly because this essentially middle-class form of literary art was bound to flourish increasingly as the middle classes rose in power and importance, partly because of the steady increase of the reading public with the growth of lending libraries, the development of publishing in the modern sense, and other phenomena which accompanied this increase, and partly because the novel was the vehicle best equipped to present a picture of life lived in a given society against a stable background of social and moral values by people who were recognizably like the people encountered by readers, and this was the kind of picture of life the middle class reader wanted to read about."\* The early Victorian novel as cultivated by Disraeli, Trollope, Dickens, Thackeray, Kingslake, Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Reade was essentially a transcript from life, and instead of seeking inspiration from the Middle Ages or the world of romance, the early Victorian novelists concentrated on the social, political, economic aspects of Victorian society. Realism, sometimes blatant and sometimes in the subdued key, became a characteristic feature of early Victorian novel. The novelists came to close grips with the problems facing Victorian society and sought to find a solution to the rampant evils of the age. The novel, like other forms of literature, became purposive in character, and ceased to be a source of pure entertainment. "The Victorian novel-reader did not want to be entertained, and in a sense he wanted to escape. But he wanted to be entertained with a minimum of literary convention, a mainimum of aesthetic distance. He wanted to be

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.



close to what he was reading about, to have as little suspension of disbelief as possible, to pretend, indeed, that literature was journalism, that fiction was history.”\* The Victorian reader found in fiction what he looked for, and the early Victorian novelists provided him a historical perspective of the age in all its varied aspects.

The early Victorian novelists were in accord with their public, and gratified the public taste by their enlivening pictures of life. “They were conditioned by it, as of course any novelist must be but for the most part were willingly conditioned by it. They identified themselves with their age and were its spokesmen.”\*\* No doubt there is presence of the satiric spirit in Disraeli and Thackeray, but inspite of the satiric shafts the novelists do not show a particular disgust with the age. There is plenty of irony and plain thrusts in Dickens, but he is well satisfied with the age in which he lived. “For all the squalor, sin, and pain in the novels of Dickens, the impression left on reading any one of them is, that he believed as implicitly as Leibnitz that this is the best of all possible worlds.”‡

The early Victorian novelists did not very much bother about coherent plots. The structure of the novel in the hands of Disraeli, Dickens, and Thackeray is loose and the progress of the story is hampered by episodic intrusions, unconnected descriptions and moral sermons by the novelists. The novels of Dickens, the chief among the early novelists of the Victorian age are “often like shapeless bags into which all manner of different objects of varying shapes and sizes have been ruthlessly crammed. They contain something for everybody and the parts you do not like you can more or less ignore.”† The same formlessness is perceptible in the novels of Thackeray. To quote Lord David Cecil again “Thackeray was a very uncertain craftsman. His hold on structure is very slack; he does not bother to weave the different strands of his theme together; loose ends dangle in the air, no careful revision has cut out the tufts of unnecessary material

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David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature

\* Walter Allen : The English Novel.

‡ W. L. Cross : Development of English Novel

† Lord David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists

that have accumulated during the hurry of first writing."

The early novelists of the Victorian age had a love for history, and inspite of realistic touches in their fiction we can find them working in the line of historical fiction left by Sir Walter Scott. Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities*, Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho*, Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* are historical novels of the age.

**Q. 48. Give your estimate of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81) as an early Victorian novelist.**

**Ans.** Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister of England, was an important figure in the early Victorian fiction. He was an alien and a jew, but he was intensely interested in the social, political, and economic conditions of England, during his times. He was primarily a politician and it is very natural that his novels are political novels and embody his vision of an advanced political society. "He is our only political novelist; I mean, the only one *saturated* in politics; the only one whose intellect feasts on polity."\* His novels, particularly *The Infernal Marriage*, *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred* present many political and social types sometimes with a kindly humour and often with a satiric, biting irony and wit. His novels bring out the unelevating comedies of political muddle and panic, and present in a vivacious style the lust for power and political ascendancy. He speculates with malice on the dubious political career of many adventurers, and offers destructive criticism of the shams and disasters which proved the bane of the regime of the Duke of Wellington. "No one describes a ball, or a house-party, or a dinner as well as Disraeli, for no one so quickly and neatly gives one the foibles and background of the guests. His family histories are masterpieces of irony. He knows the private cankers of grandeur, the long machinations that have produced a Lord Monmouth or a Lord Marney. All his ladies are ravishing; nevertheless, though never losing his sympathy for the female

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

\*\* V.S. Pritchett : The Living Novel.

character and never ceasing to flatter he sets it out with the coolest impartiality.”\*

#### His Works..

Disraeli began his career as novelist with the portrait of a dandy, *Vivian Grey* (1826-27), who excels in shifty ways than in morality and virtue. He is an adventurer with more brains and cunningness than scruples. He is a young, ambitious and dashing youth who thinks that he can achieve success by his wits and audacity. He forms a political clique with the marquis of Carabas, a selfish disappointed politician, as the leader. He seeks to create a new political party with the help of many discontented peers and M. Ps. who join his group under his own leadership. Vivian Grey's plans to set up a political party are foiled by the machinations of the treacherous Mr. Lorraine. He is challenged by Cleveland. He dubs Vivian Grey as a traitor and a man of audacious ambition. In the duel Cleveland is killed and Vivian Grey leaves the country when he finds no one supporting his claims to leadership in the party. He moves to the continent and passes through many adventures in love and politics in which he meets with discomfiture and disappointments. He presents a sorry spectacle in the concluding years of his life and knows himself to be the most unfortunate and unhappy being that ever existed.

In the novels which followed Disraeli's entrance into Parliament he expounded his views as a democratic Tory and founder of 'Young England' movement, and unfolded his vision of progressive British imperialism. In *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847) he directed the attention of the aristocratic classes to the wretched lot of the labourers, and worked for the emancipation of the workers. He tried to stem the tide of industrial individualism, starving and fouling the English countries and filling the banks of England with gold.

These three novels constituting 'Young England,' are discussion novels based on political and religious questions. They are written from the Tory viewpoint against liberal individualism.

In *Coningsby* (1844) Disraeli directs our attention to the political events from the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, down

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\* V. S. Pritchett : The Living Novel.

to the fall of the Melbourne ministry in 1841. "These provide the author with opportunity for expounding his own political creed, his contempt for the conservatism without principles which he attributed to the party of Peel, his hostility to the Whigs and utilitarianism, his condemnation of the new poor law and the unimaginative treatment of the peasantry."

In *Sybil* or *The Two Nations* (1845) Disraeli depicts the conditions of the working classes in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, and woefully laments the overcrowding in miserable tenements, the inadequate wages, and the 'truck' system. He satirises the selfishness of landlords and employers towards serfs and labourers and relates the agitation against them that led up to the Chartist riots. The *Two Nations* of the title refer to the two classes of the rich and the poor existing in England during the Victorian age.

"With this exposition is woven the story of the love of the generous and enlightened Charles Egremont, younger brother of Lord Marney, one of the meanest of the landlord class for Sybil, the daughter of Gerard, one of the Chartist leaders. The dramatic force of the situation is heightened by making Sybil belong to the family of the last abbot of Marney, whose lands had been plundered under Henry VIII."

This novel exposes the wretched lot of the workers and pleads for their betterment. It has great power to move. The descriptions of miners and mines, and the riots that follow in the wake of distress are graphic and can move workers to agitation in all times to come.

*Tancred* or *The New Crusade* (1847) is a Jewish novel vindicating the claims and destinies of the Jewish race with a humorous presentment of the aspirations of a visionary young English nobleman to regenerate the world. Tancred, Lord Montacute, is a Jew. He has a bright political career ahead of him. Instead of sticking to politics, he goes to Jerusalem and thence to Sinai, where he receives the divine command to promote the doctrine of 'theocratic equality.' Later on he falls in love intrigue, and is completely disillusioned in his life. In this novel Disraeli combined histrionic imagination with a genius for the necessary compromises and calculating

realism of ordinary politics.

**Estimate.**

Disraeli is essentially a political novelist. The movements of English politics under Queen Victoria can be studied better in Disraeli's novels than anywhere else. His novels are purposive in character, satiric in intent, and reformatory in tone. They exhibit his confident familiarity with aristocratic manners, and present his political and historical imagination working on fantastic schemes and ambitious plans. "His novels are flamboyant, but it is the flamboyancy of a grandiose political imagination in which high idealism and exhibitionist dandyism are oddly combined."\*

Disraeli's style has splendour and brilliance about it. He is generally splendid, dazzling and gorgeous, but sometimes he is tawdry, vulgar and flat. His epigrammatic wit and flashing hits at artificiality and hypocrisy have given to his works their modern appeal.

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**Q. N. 49. Write a note on the achievements of Bulwer Lytton (1803—1873) as a Novelist.**

**Ans.** Bulwer Lytton was one of the prolific novelists of the Victorian age. He was a versatile and talented novelist with a great regard for his craft. He responded to the varying tastes of his age and produced a variety of novels satisfying the changing needs of his time. He has to his credit a number of novels dealing with society, history, domestic life and roguery. Had he written less with a sustained energy, he would have been among the great Victorian novelists. As it is, his work is only of a secondary importance. His genius was essentially of a derivative character. Compton-Rickett says, "Lytton's work is distinctly imitative, but it is dexterous and showy and exhibits a versatile, if not a profound mind." Moved by the craze to satisfy the public taste, he sped from one type of novel to another with great rapidity, but in trying to gain popularity, he sacrificed profundity, sincerity, and depth which are so very essential for a novelist. Bulwer sought to be a realist, but he could not

make substantial addition to realism in fiction. W. L. Cross, in the *Development of the English Novel* points out that, "Bulwer Lytton did not appreciably raise the quality of the realism of current fiction. He was too plainly imitative, and he took as his model not a realist, but a writer who had played fantastically with real life."

In his first novel *Falkland*, Bulwer Lytton imitated Godwin and in the second novel *Pelham* (1828) he tried to combine the novel of fashion with the socialistic novel of Godwin. It represents the adventures of Pelham, a young politician in search of recognition in the fashionable society of his times. *The Coming Race* is the romance of the future, representing the author's visit to a subterranean race finding refuge from the ravages of the world in the bowels of the earth. The novelist pictures a blessed society free from the evils of woe, crime, poverty and social injustice. Here too the influence of Godwin is palpably felt.

From fashionable and political novels, Lytton drifted to the composition of Historical Romances which had been popularised by Sir Walter Scott. He produced five historical romances : *Devereux* (1829) *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) *Rienzi* (1835) *The Last of the Barons* (1843) and *Harold* (1848). In these historical novels, Bulwer imitated Aeschylus and Sophocles and kept aside playing a sedulous ape to Scott. He bodily put into his narrative countless details which Scott would have rejected or sifted. His method produced more history, less imagination, and a slower movement.

Of the historical romances of Lytton the most significant and popular is *The Last Days of Pompeii*. In this novel Lytton sought to picture in its rich and florid colours as possible the gorgeous splendid life of the people of Pompeii before the unfortunate city was submerged and destroyed by the devastating volcano Vesuvius in 79 A. D. The theme of the novel is the love of two young Greeks, Glaucus and Ione, and the villainous designs of Arbaces, the girl's guardian, who is enamoured of his ward. When the city is overwhelmed, the blind girl Nydia, who cherishes a hopeless passion for Glaucus saves the two lovers by leading them through darkness to the open light of the sea.

The next historical novel that deserves mention is *The Last*

*of the Barons* published in 1843. This work is marked with a note of intellectuality and is written from the standpoint of a philosopher and a psychologist. In this novel Lytton discusses elaborately the social forces that were responsible for the disintegration of feudal forces and the rise of the middle classes. The fall of the house of Warwick, the last of the Barons, is presented with pathos, and the sympathy of the novelist is for Warwick, the king-maker.

To catch the eye and appreciation of the middle class Lytton attempted domestic novels, the chief of them being, *The Caxton* (1850) and *A Strange Story* (1862). In *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton narrates with gentle humour, the simple annals of the Caxton family. He gives a pleasant picture of the father, a kindly scholar absorbed in a great work, his uncle Jack who pursues his mania for speculative enterprises with results fatal to the Caxton family. Romance is added to the story by the attempted elopement of Vivian with Fanny Trevanion, a rich heiress.

As a novelist Lytton cannot be considered great. His genius was imitative and derivative. He lacked humour, and was always overstepping the border line between the sublime and the ridiculous. "His chief faults are insincerity and floridity of phrase. Modern readers probably find most of his novels ponderous and dreary; but half a dozen or so of his extremely varied books will always find some appreciative and even enthusiastic admirers."

**Q. 50.** Give a critical account of the main novels of Charles Dickens (1812—1870).

**Ans.** Charles Dickens was undoubtedly the greatest of the Victorian novelists. He was a great genius and both as a novelist and as a popular entertainer he held the stage during his life time. The popular craze for his novels went up with the publication of his serial novels and more and more of Dickens was demanded by the reading public. There is rarely a novelist in England save Sir Walter Scott who had been in perfect tune and harmony with his public. "If pleasing the public be itself an art, then Dickens is one of our greatest artists. And it is well to remember that in pleasing his public there was nothing of the hypocrite or demagogue in his make up. He was essentially

a part of the great drifting panoramic crowd that he loved. We may note here a very significant parallel with Shakespeare. The great difference in the genius and work of the two men does not change the fact that each won success largely because each studied and pleased his public.”\*

The novels of Dickens have an eternal freshness about them. Custom cannot stale their charm, nor the change of fashion can their alluring and enlivening vivacity. They have in them the spirit of youthfulness and buoyancy. Their humour is of a sparkling kind and is a sufficient guarantee against the incursion of gloominess and despair. “He is the one novelist of his school” says Lord David Cecil in *Early Victorian Novelists*, “whose books have not grown at all dusty on the shelves, whose popularity has suffered no sensible decline. He is not only the most famous of the Victorian novelists, he is the most typical. If we are to see the distinguishing virtues and defects of his school at their clearest, we must examine Dickens.”

“Beginning as little more than a comic journalist, he soon discovered his special gifts as a novelist, gifts which enabled him to present to his delighted readers stories set in his own day or the recent past in which the vitality of the characters, the enthusiastic savouring of their physical environment, the movement from comedy to pathos and from compassion to horror, and the sheer high spirits with which he rendered eccentrics, villains, unfortunates, hypocrisies, social climbers, criminals, innocents, bureaucrats, self-deceivers, roisterers, are presented with an almost reckless profusion.”\*\*

#### Dickens's Early Novels.

“Dickens began with a great sense of life and little sense of form, capturing the individual oddity, the extravagant moment, with remarkable skill, and then marking time, as it were, until he could introduce another such oddity and another such movement.”

Dickens began his career as a novelist with *Sketches by Boz* (1836) a series dealing with London life in the style and manner of Leigh Hunt. The next work of Dickens the *Pickwick Papers* caught the public eye and at once placed him at the helm of nove-

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\* W. J. Long : English Literature.

\*\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.



lists excelling in humour and light-hearted gaiety. It was published serially in 1836—1837. Originally the book was intended to be written for a sporting club, a Nimrod Club, but since Dickens had very little acquaintance with sports, the plan was given up. He changed the idea to that of a general club for travel and investigation, the Pickwick Club, and “only retained one fated sportsman, Mr. Winkle, the melancholy remnant of the Nimrod Club that never was.” The first seven pictures appeared with the signature of the cartoonist Seymour who took up the work of illustrating the events of Dickens’s chapters. In the meantime Seymour died and Dickens was left free to extend the canvas of his work according to the play of his fecund imagination. He produced a novel that proved to be the most uproarious and hilarious that the British public had so far known. The book recounts the adventures of Pickwick and his companions. Winkle, Snodgrass, Tupman and Samweller through numerous changes of fortune that land them in difficult and straitened situations from which they are extricated by the ingenuity and skill of Mr. Pickwick, the eldest and the most experienced of the adventurers. The novel begins as a burlesque, but soon moves into a more substantial kind of picaresque comedy, where the interest lies not only in particular absurd incidents but also in the way in which given characters react to new kinds of environment. There are more than sixty lively and sparkling scenes of humour with more than three hundred and fifty characters, some of them making their appearance only once to win for them a lasting place in our heart. “The incidents are loosely connected and the chronology will not bear inspection, but in abundance of detail of a high quality, in vivacity of humour, in acute and accurate observation, the book is of the first rank. It is doubtful if Dickens ever improved upon it.”\* Burlesque, caricature, satire, comedy, the presentation of the English scene, the panoramic view of life—these different aspects of the book are never fully drawn together, they do not always rise out of each other but exist side by side, so that *Pickwick* remains episodic, a bedside book to be taken up and put down at any point, a picaresque

novel which stops simply because the author can think of no more to say.”\*

While ‘Pickwick Papers’ was still in racy progress, Dickens became editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a magazine, for which he began *Oliver Twist* in serial form. The theme of this novel is the pathos and innocence of childhood vis-a-vis the wickedness and criminality of villains and pickpockets like Fagin, the old Jew, and his accomplices, the burglar Bill Sikes, and the Artful Dodger and Nancy. Oliver Twist is brought up in a Poor House dominated by Bumble, the parish beadle. He is tyrannical, and one day when Oliver ‘asks for more’ than his usual share of food, he receives a heavy rebuff from the authorities which ultimately drives him out of the Poor House, to be claimed by a host of villains headed by Fagin. Oliver Twist is brought up as pickpocket and a thief. He is sent on a thieving expedition where he receives a wound. He is rescued by a good man, Mr. Bronlow, but is again entrapped by the rogues, who are ultimately brought to book and punished severely for their nefarious and evil design. Fagin is hanged, and Sikes commits suicide. Oliver Twist is restored to good fortune and strange revelations are made about his parentage and relationship with Rose, the daughter of his saviour. The novel ends on a note of comedy, though throughout the work the tragedy of persecuted life is presented with a grimness and macabre imagination of which Dickens was a master.

*Oliver Twist* is a study in crime and villainy. The moral sense of the novelist does not allow the triumph of wickedness at the end. Dickens shows that “vice systematically pursued does not yield the delights gaily asserted by the romancers.” Social reform is suggested in the working for Poor Houses, and a strong case is made out for the dismissal of flint hearted persons as Bumble. An spirited appeal is made for the better treatment of children. The reformatory and idealistic tone of the novelist is clearly presented for the first time in *Oliver Twist*.

“The book is full of nightmare symbols of loss, isolation and incarceration. It is also a portrait gallery, (done in Dickens’s best style) together with a sense of vividly etched pictures of physical locations and single incidents; it contains some great

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

memorable scenes, but the humanitarian feeling that informs the novel is not sufficient to give it adequate form. Oliver's salvation remains 'accidental, and comes only when (and because) Dickens has exhausted his ammunition."

Before the completion of *Oliver Twist* in 1838, Dickens began the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*, again a reformatory novel, attacking the evil practices in some of the Yorkshire schools. This novel is a scathing criticism of harsh and heartless teachers like Squeers, and a fierce condemnation of the kind of teaching imparted by the teachers in schools like the Dotheboys Hall. The themes of suffering childhood and oppressive institutions are united in Dotheboys Hall, a composite picture of the Yorkshire schools which Dickens had personally visited.

"The central vision of human fate in *Nicholas Nickleby* if it exists at all, is weak and unconvincing, and certainly incapable of drawing together into a complex artistic whole the various scenes-so many of them magnificent in themselves in the novel."\*

*Humphrey's Clock* was to be the frame for his next serial *Old Curiosity Shop*. In this novel Dickens portrays the pathetic and miserable life of Little Nell and her grandfather who are subjected to financial difficulties as the result of certain borrowings by the old man from a sinister and iniquitous money lender, Daniel Quilp, who harasses them mercilessly, till Little Nell meets her death followed by her grandfather. The death of Nell and her grandfather at once reminds us of the death of Cordelia and King Lear, though the tone of pathos in the hands of Dickens crosses the pitch of genuine pathos and slips into the kingdom of sentimentality. Whereas Shakespeare pictures the death of Cordelia in muffled tones and gentle touches, Dickens presents the death of Nell with the resounding of the mourner's pathetic cries. The death scene of Little Nell has become the standard example of Dickensian sentimentality expressed in an inflated and embarrassing style. Lord David Cecil comments on the tone of pathos in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, "Dickens had a natural gift for homely pathos. But almost always he sins flagrantly against both which govern its use. He overstates. He tries to wring an

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

extra tear from the situation; he never lets it speak for itself. One would have thought the death of an innocent and virtuous child should be allowed to carry its own emotion, but Dickens cannot trust us to be moved by Little Nell's departure from the world unassisted by church bells, falling snow at the window, and every other ready made device for extracting our tears that a cheap rhetoric can provide."\*

Dickens's next work **Barnaby Rudge** is an historical-cum-romantic novel dealing with the Gordon anti-papery riots of 1780 that shook England for a considerable time. "It is a more controlled work and a stronger one : in it Dickens first displays to the full his ability to discipline melodrama into a sombre if not quite a tragic pattern and to isolate individual eccentrics to a general atmosphere in which they seem somehow inevitable."

**Martin Chuzzlewit** is a formless work. In spite of the fact that it contains many fine characters and theatrical situations, it cannot be placed high among the novels of Dickens. In this novel Dickens concentrates on moral problems, rather than a group of picturesque characters and incidents. He exposes the seamy side of life based on hypocrisies, corruptions and pretensions. Though there are numerous digressions from the main thread, yet the attention of the novelist on the main theme remains glued to the last. No doubt there are many scenes and characters in the book who have no direct or even indirect relation to the theme, yet its moral force is well pronounced. This novel links Dickens more clearly to the other Victorian Novelists—Thackeray on the one hand and George Eliot on the other—than anything else he had written so far. In learning how to discipline his genius for caricature, irony, melodrama, and drollery to a moral vision, Dickens took his place among the Victorians as essentially one of them. The novel deals with the adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit first in England and then in America. The American life of Martin was portrayed by Dickens in an unsatisfactory manner, and the novel failed to enthuse the American readers. In this novel Dickens gives us some of his finished portraits. His minor characters do not play a significant part in the

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\* Lord David Cecil : *Early Victorian Novelists*.

development of the plot but they are better remembered than the main characters who figure prominently in the main threads of the story. Of these supplementary characters who really deserve our appreciation, the most well known are Pecksniff, an architect and an arch hypocrite, Mrs. Gamp, the disreputable old nurse, Tom Pinch, Pecksniff's gentle loyal assistant, and Mark Tapley, the optimistic and cheerful servant of Martin who follows him to America.

**Dombey and Son** is the last novel of this period. It is a study in the evil effects of pride and haughtiness of temper. When the novel opens we meet Mr. Dombey, a proud, rich merchant. He is the proprietor of the firm Dombey and Son. He has been blessed with a son, Paul, though his wife dies in the delivery of the son. Dombey proudly brings up his son Paul Dombey, and sends him to Dr. Blimber's school when he comes of age. Paul Dombey is ill-treated and under the strenuous discipline the boy sickens and dies. Dombey, after the death of Paul, neglects his daughter Florence, who starts loving Walter Gay, a frank good hearted youth in Dombey's service. The proud Dombey does not like this love affair and sends Walter Gay to the West Indies so that their love may not fructify. Dombey marries again, but his pride and insolence dissatisfy his newly married wife who elopes with Dombey's manager, Mr. Carker, to France. Dombey pursues them for they have humbled him. Carker is overtaken at a railway station. He falls in front of a train and is killed. Dombey sustains heavy losses in business. He is completely broken down. He retires to spend the remaining days of his life in solitude where he is joined by his neglected daughter Florence, who brings solace to his cheerless life. This novel is better formed and has greater coherence than *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It occupies a distinctive place among the early novels of Dickens.

#### **His Later Novels.**

Among the later novels of Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849-50) is the best. It is Dickens's veiled autobiography. "The pen which wrote *David Copperfield*" says Hugh Walker, "was often dipped in his own blood." Dickens himself liked this novel and remarked. "I like *David Copperfield* the best." The life and adventures of David Copperfield are, in fact, the adventures of

Dickens, the novelist. The figure of the immortal Macawher is the picture of his own father. Uriah Heep, who stands for fawning flattery and sneaking humility, Murdstone who typifies a cruel father, Peggoty standing for a kind nurse, Betsy Trotwood representing a benevolent though eccentric lady are the memorable portraits of this novel. Commenting on the excellence of this novel Baker observes. "Both critical and popular opinions are at one in voting David Copperfield their favourite among the novels of Dickens. First of all, it happens to be in large part his autobiography. There is a plot in David Copperfield, and some of the largest episodes are as theatrical as any ever devised. It is a tale of ups and downs, joys and sorrows, but the prevailing tone is one of cheerfulness and confidence in the essential goodness of life. And though it is not entirely free from the ensnaring device of poetic justice, this is not one of his didactic stories. On the contrary, except for the exposure of Uriah Heep, a few reformations of sinners, and the lurid tragedy of Steerforth, all of which are extraneous to the history of David this is tolerably free from both moralism and melodrama." "It is a prose poem of love wedlock."

Dickens's next novel **Bleak House**, was published in 1853. It is a vigorous satire on the abuses of law courts, particularly the old court of Chancery. No better exposure of the delays and iniquities of the law courts is found in Victorian novels than in this work.

**Hard Times** was published in 1854. It is a satirical exposure of the evils of industrialism and the excessive love for money and worship of machinery. In this novel Dickens turns his attention to the morality of the utilitarian industrialist and its effect on the possibilities of human happiness. Gradgrind, a lover of money and a man of practical wisdom, and Josiah Bounderby, a manufacturer and a rich merchant, are the objects of satire. The novel attacks gross materialism and upholds imaginative and spiritual values in human life.

**Little Dorrit**, published in 1857 deals with the delays in Govt. institutions particularly the Circumlocution Office and Marshalsea prison. William Dorrit had to spend many years of his life in Marshalsea prison. Through his character and expe-

riences, the evils of prison life are attacked. Reform in prison-life is suggested in this novel. "Little Dorrit presents with sombre power, paradoxes of fate and fortune while incidentally carrying the share of social propaganda (about prison conditions) which is an element in nearly all of the novels."

*A Tale of Two Cities* published in 1859 is an historical novel dealing with the events of the French Revolution that shuddered the whole of Europe. The two cities are London and Paris. Scenes change from one city to another. The main characters of this novel are Dr. Marnet, who suffered for many years in Bastille, Lucy Marnet, his daughter, who married Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat, Sidney Carton, the young lawyer who sacrificed his life at the altar of Lucy's love in order to save the life of Charles Darnay, Madame Defarge, the cruel, hard-hearted revolutionary leader of the French and Miss Pross, who is the protecting angel of Lucy. It is a literary work, rich in history and sound in plot construction.

*A Tale of Two Cities* was followed by *Great Expectations* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The first novel occupies a very high place among the works of Dickens, while the last one is placed at a low level. *Great Expectations* is a novel of adventure recounting the trials and tribulations in the life of Pip, a young boy, and the help that he receives from his brother-in-law Joe-Gargery, a simple minded man, and the convict Abel Magwitch, whom he had once provided food in the wilds of London. The character of Miss Havisham, a rich eccentric lady is unrealistic though interesting. Love between Pip and Estella adds to the interest of the novel.

*Edwin Drood* is the last unfinished novel dealing with the problem of murder and its detection. Edwin Drood, an orphan, loves Rosa, another orphan girl. They are engaged to each other. Another young man Neville also starts flirting with Rosa. This brings Neville and Edwin Drood in conflict. One night Edwin Drood disappears and is not traced out. It is suspected that Neville has murdered him. At the special pleading of Edwin Drood's uncle, Jasper, Neville is arrested. Since no trace of Edwin's body is found he is released. Vigorous attempts are made to solve the mystery of Edwin Drood's disappearance,

but no good comes out of the investigations. "When Wilkie Collins wrote *The Moonstone* and Dickens, not to be outdone, followed it with *Edwin Drood*, we begin the long career of murder for murder's sake, murder which illustrates nothing and is there only to stimulate our skill in detection and to distract us with mystery."\*

**Q. 51.** Write a note on Dickens's general reputation as a novelist.

**Ans.** Charles Dickens was undoubtedly the greatest novelist of the Victorian age. "He is the one novelist of his school" says David Cecil, "whose books have not grown at all dusty on the shelves, whose popularity has suffered no sensible decline. He is not only the most famous of the Victorian novelists, he is the most typical." He was the most popular novelist of the times, and C. E. Eckersley remarks pertinently "whether any English writer has ever been so popular not only with one class or one generation, but with all classes, rich and poor, young and old alike." In his own country he was heartily loved and there was a national mourning when he breathed his last. When Dickens was buried in Westminster Abbey, close by the monuments of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dryden, there was an unending stream of mourners who came to pay their homage to the departed artist who had brought cheer and sunshine to many homes. "All day long" wrote Dean Stanley, "crowds passed slowly by : many flowers were laid there by unknown hands, many tears shed from unknown eyes."

Dickens's fame was not confined to England. He was as popular on the continent as in his home country. He received admiration and applause in America, Russia, Italy and Germany. "Tolstoy" says David Cecil—"thought of him one of the few supreme novelists that had ever lived, many critics have considered him the greatest novelist of England." Dickens possessed creative imagination of a high order, and that accounted for the popularity of his novels. "No English novelist had it quite in the way Dickens had, Scott's imagination and Emily Brontë's were

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\* Pritchett : The Living Novel



of a finer quality; Jane Austen's [was more] exactly articulated, but none of them had an imagination at once so forceful, so varied, and self dependent as Dickens's. Indeed his best passages have the immediate irresistible force of music. Unassisted by verisimilitude or intellectual interest he sweeps us away as Wagner does by sheer dramatic intensity. That is why his popularity has not declined."\*

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**Q. 52. Comment on Dickens's art of plot construction.**

**Ans.** The plots of Dickens's novels are incoherent and lack unity. They are marked with discursiveness and diffuseness. There are elaborate passages of description and redundant details which do not seem to have a bearing on the development of the story. His novels are "often like shapeless bags in which all manner of different objects, of varying shapes and sizes, have been ruthlessly crammed. They contain something for every body, and the parts you do not like you can more or less ignore."\*\* Dickens freely indulges in humorous conversations, and after pages of scintillating talks he is reminded of the main thread of the story, and comes back hastily to the right lines only to aberrate after a short while. He then connects old forgotten facts, "all the harder to follow from the fact that the fallible human memory has had to carry it unhelped through the long space of time since he let fall his thread."† Only in his later novels, *Bleak House*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Our Mutual Friend* did he develop something like coherent plots, but the rest of his novels suffer from formlessness and incoherence. "The main strands of his novel are knotted roughly together and the minor wisps are left hanging forlornly."††

Like most of the Victorian novelists Dickens did not conceive the story of his novel as an organic whole of which every incident and character forms a contributory and integral part. Generally he chose a conventional plot and then adjusted it forcibly to a setting and character which had no organic connection with the

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

• Walter Allen : Six Great Novelists.

† David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

†† Ibid.

main thread of the story. In his earlier novels Dickens failed to create unity of plot and tried to tie up the ends of the action in the last chapter only. In his plots he was more concerned with far fetched eccentricity, some piece of knavishness, some unlikely occurrence to deck his tale. He cared more for entertainment than for artistic stories.

This formlessness and incoherence in Dickens's plot are mainly due to his lack of intellectual strength which could not impose any form and discipline on the discursive matter of his novels. "Dickens's intellectual weakness meant that he had no sense of form. He could not impose order on the tumult of his inspiration. Figures and scenes swam into his mind in a coloured confusion. He just strung them together on any worn thread of clumsy conventional plot he could think of."\* The serial system of publication of novel and stories in magazines and periodicals also accounted for incoherence and formlessness in his novels as in the novels of W.M. Thackeray, his contemporary.

Dickens was more interested in men than in manners. His interest was in characters rather than incidents. In his novels character is the main thing and plot is subordinate to character. He agreed perfectly with Turgenev's pronouncement that the writer of fiction should begin with his characters and not with his plots. Dickens did not bestow any care upon his plots, and stretched and strained them to the utmost to accommodate his characters. Once he had invented his personages and got them going, he felt strongly that it was their business to tell the story and not his. If they got out of hand and decided to have their own way, he was more or less inclined to let them have their way. He allowed them to talk themselves out to the full. And when they had been wearied of talking, he again came to the main plot to proceed it further. That was Dickens's method and he developed it into an art which he alone could master.

Though Dickens is not a master of plot construction, yet as a narrator of his tales he is admirable. "He may not construct the story well, but he tells it admirably," says David Cecil. With the first sentence of the novel he grips the attention of the reader and does not allow it to loosen till the end. He introduces enough

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

of thrill and excitement, enough of the macabre to keep up the excited interest of his readers.

"The plots of his dramas are often bad, the scenery is always admirable. Little Nell may be a theatrical figure, the sentiment haloing her death, the cheapest emotionalism, but we see the setting, the snowy churchyard and dark peaceful cottage, as clearly as though we were there. The story of Dedlock family may be as convention as a fashion-plate; but the gloomy Northfolk house where it takes place with its fading silks and decaying, inherited elegance, and always outside the flat, Norfolk levels, with the clouds brooding low above them, lives in the memory for ever.\*

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**Q. 53. Write a note on Dickens's Realism, Plastic Imagination and Morality.**

**Ans.** The spirit of romance had attained its acme in the hands of Sir Walter Scott, who had deliberately kept himself aloof from the reformatory and humanitarian consideration of the Victorian novelists. The old world of romance woven dexteriously by Scott was rudely reduced to shreds and patches by Dickens and his followers. Instead of turning their gaze to the Middle Ages and haunted castles of Gothic Romance, Dickens and his followers sought to derive inspiration from real life, from London life, as they witnessed it. His readers were also well satisfied with his preoccupation with reality rather than romance. "It was the 'here and now' they wanted to read about; they were not sufficiently familiar with the past to be curious about it. And they did not want kings and queens as the dramatist personae of their novels; they wanted ordinary men and women like themselves."

Dickens was a realist in his art, and for inspiration and guidance he turned to Fielding and Smollet. Dickens portrayed in his novels the life he had intimately known and witnessed as a reporter. He had the occasion to visit circuses, pleasure gardens, prisons, boarding houses, and the rich experiences garnered from these personal visits were used by him as the

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

warp and woof of his novels. The slums of *Oliver Twist*, the law courts of *Bleak House*, the west-end of *Little Dorrit*, the waterside of *Our Mutual Friend*, are scenes of realism representing the author's love for real life.

Dickens was essentially the novelist of London-life. He portrayed London streets, fog, lamps, courts and the life of the middle class people whom he had intimately known. But his presentation of all these sights and scenes of real life was not like that of a photographer. He soaked reality with his imaginative colouring, and presented in the guise of realism an idealised picture of London Life. "As a whole his picture is not like the life that people are familiar with. The world, he sets before his readers is a world of his own imagination."\* "What Dickens gives us is not the bare hard fact," says Hugh Walker in the *Victorian Era in Literature*, "but the fact suffused with the glow of a rich imagination." God had endowed Dickens with a rich, poetic and constructive imagination, and he used it like an artist to make things better or worse than they actually were. Exaggeration coloured his pictures of life. His world, apparently real, becomes the country of nightmare or Fairy land. "The world of the *Pickwick Papers* is a cockney world turned into Fairy land with Pickwick and the Wellers the fairies at the centre ; but the novel with which Dickens followed it was *Oliver Twist*, and *Oliver Twist* is a nightmare of a terrified child haunted by ogres."\*\*

The real, the great, the unique merit of Dickens is that he brought to the service of the novel an imagination which though never poetic was plastic to the highest degree, and by the help of that imagination, he could create a world, which though distinctly different from that of actuality has a distinct reality of its own, and it does not exactly force belief in itself; it forces suspension of disbelief, an achievement achieved by Coleridge in his poetry.\*\*\*

To sum up our discussion, we may say that, "Dickens lulls by the familiarity of his settings into the belief that he is a realist. But his realism lies on the surface and his pictures of London life

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\* A. E. Baker: *English Novel*.

\*\* Wallter Allen: *Six Great Novelists*

\*\*\* George Saintsbury : *History of the English Novel*.

are magnificent pieces of idealised descriptions sometimes as fantastic as a passage from Notre Dame.”\*

Dickens was at heart a moralist and an idealist, and inspite of his presentation of sinful and sordid life in his novels, he had no sympathy with it. He presented sinful life only to condemn it at the end. “For all the squalor, sin and pain in the novels of Dickens” says W. L. Cross, “the impression left on reading any one of them is that he believed as implicitly as Leibnitz that is the best of all possible worlds.” Dickens had faith in the triumph of virtue. As an idealist and moralist it was Dickens’s object to expose the evils of the pursuits of robbers and pickpockets. He depicted scenes of crime and degradation only to condemn them at the end. He never ministered or pandered to a morbid taste. He maintained the ‘purity of tone’ in his novels and invariably espoused the cause of virtue. His instinct is rather to pick out the gleam of beauty from the midst of ugliness and the example of virtue from among the multitudes of the vicious. There are many vile characters in his pages, Fagin and Sikes and all their crew, and there are many sordid scenes. Frequently his taste is questionable, and at least one scene, the picture of spontaneous combustion, is loathsome. But such scenes and characters are aberrations things not all of the essence of the method.”\*\*

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**Q. 54. Write an essay on Dickens as a social reformer.**

**Ans.** Corruption and evils were running rampant in every nook and corner of the Victorian society and the novelists took upon themselves a self-imposed task to eradicate the evils that had already attracted the pens of the intellectuals. Among the Victorian novelists Dickens was the greatest social reformer who directed his pen to root out the evils of Victorian society. In almost all his novels whether sad or humorous, he laid his finger on the drawbacks and evils of the Victorian society which Shakespeare had already hinted in *Hamlet* :

*The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,*

*.....the law’s delay,*

*The insolence of office, and the spurns*

**Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.**

**Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era**

*That patient merit of the unworthy takes.*

Dickens was a humanitarian novelist and luckily for him there was no Dr. Johnson to condemn his reformatory zeal. In the Victorian society, Dickens became very popular because he harnessed his pen for the amelioration of the suffering and pathetic conditions of the poor factory workers, little children groaning under the whips of tyrannical school-masters, litigants moving about law courts without getting any justice, and prisoners subjected to the hardship of rigorous prison life. Dickens tried to arouse the public conscience to these evils, though he alone was not a pioneer in reformatory zeal which had appeared earlier in the novels of Defoe, Fielding, Goldsmith and the revolutionary novels of Godwin. But all the same in the novels of Dickens the reformatory zeal was particularly emphasised. After the publication of *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Old Curiosity Shop*, he was, to quote Prof. Cross, "the greatest social reformer for full thirty years."

Dickens was no doubt a social reformer, but he himself did not take up the cudgels in his hands, nor did he personally work as a social reformer like Shaftesbury. His role as a social reformer was simply to arouse the public conscience to these evils and induce practical social reformers to introduce healthy reforms in the contaminated stream of social life. Dickens blazed the track for other social reformers who had to pursue the lines of reform suggested by him in his novels, for removing the evils and shortcomings in the world of education, prison life, law courts etc.

Dickens railed against the social, political, economic and educational drawbacks of his times. In *Oliver Twist* Dickens exposed the weakness of the Parish administration. The novel shows in lurid colours the misadventures of a poor boy, Oliver who was born in a workhouse and fell in the hands of thieves, and receivers who brought him up in the standards of Fagin's academy. In *Bleak House* Dickens shows law's delay and the corrupt system of election. Elections in his novels are always corrupt and comic, the members of parliament appearing as strutting boobies. Dickens shows the caste system of the ancient regime in *A Tale of Two Cities*. In *Nicholas Nickleby* he exposes the evils of the charity schools, tyrannies of the school-masters and the lack of

education in England. In his novel *Hard Times* he exposes through Coketown and Mr. Gradgrind the whole system of *laissez faire* system of the Manchester School. All these evils were sought to be reformed by Dickens through the medium of his novels. He awakened the Victorian conscience and stirred it for a better way of life.

Dickens's zeal of social reform has been criticised by Bonamy Dobree and Miss Batho in their book, *The Victorians and After*. "The pity is that this giant never grew up intellectually. Whenever he touches upon social reform or anywhere begins to think, he falls below the level of second rate but the generous indignation that he shows is worthy of a full and complete man." The same view about the lack of reflectiveness in Dickens is expressed by Hugh Walker in *The Victorian Era in Literature*.

It is proper to ask whether Dickens's reformatory zeal lacks in reflection and ideas. Humphrey House says in *The Dickens World*, "Whether it is true or not, (that Dickens lacked reflective vein) the fact remains that a great number of his contemporaries—not all of them fools by the standards of the time—and a great number after him—not all so wise—adopted his reformism seriously." Several other novelists followed Dickens's reformatory zeal and worked in his way. Charles Reade in his novel *It is Never too Late to Mend* shows the rigorous life of the prisons as well as the life of the colonies. In *Hard Cash* he exposes the condition of private lunatic asylums. Charles Kingsley in his fantasy *The Water Babies* shows the evils of industrialism.

Dickens was a social reformer but he was not a blatant propagandist in the sense Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells are. Shaw was a mass propagandist. In his drama *The Widower's Houses* he presents in lurid colours the evil of slum tenements. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession* he deals with the problem of prostitution. H. G. Wells was also a propagandist-novelist. He satirised the educational impostures in *The History of Mr. Polly*, theological impostures in *Soul of Bishop*, moral impostures in *The New Machiavelli* and he attacked commercial methods in *Tono Bungay*. Wells's method in eradicating social evils was quite

different from that of Dickens. Wells adopted the method of a bully and a hector whereas Dickens achieved his aim by gentle persuasiveness. Compton Rickett rightly remarks, that Dickens "proved to be that rare type of reformer who could moralise with a smile on his lips, and mix his sermonic powders in such excellent jam, that his contemporaries did not realise for a while that he was doctoring them for their good."

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**Q. 55. Write a note on Dickens as a Humorist.**

**Ans.** "The region where humour dwells" says W. L. Cross, "is somewhere between the real and the ideal, and wherever there is a touch of reality or sense of reality, humour is bound to appear. And so Dickens shares a good deal of the element." It is as a humorist that Dickens will always be remembered. His fame as a social reformer is likely to be eclipsed and overshadowed by his perennial flow of humour. In fact, humour is the soul of his work emerging not from his lips only, but coming out directly from his heart and suffusing his entire work in its rainbow colours. Without the current of humour in his novels, the sordid and ugly pictures of life that he has drawn in novels like *Oliver Twist*, would have been simply intolerable. Dickens's novels would have appeared merely studies in the sinister side of life without the leavening touch of humour. Further it is the irradiating spark of humour that enlivens the dross, and gives to the novels their vivacity and vigour, and their exhilarating charm. Some of the characters would have missed their vitalising and enlivening force had they been presented without the touch of humour. The pretensions of Winkle to sportsmanship in *Pickwick Papers* would have lost much of their charm if Dickens had not imparted to them a humorous colour. Hence for making out appealing characters and situations it was necessary for Dickens to present them with humorous touches.

As a humorist Dickens stands next to Shakespeare. Referring to the supremacy of Dickens as a humorist Priestly remarks in his book *English Humour*, "Fashions come and fashions go, and now it is the French who are the greatest novelists in the world and now it is the Russians, but the supremacy of Dickens as a humorist remains unchallenged. We have only one name to



put beside his, as a creator of humorous character, and that, of course, is Shakespeare."

"The humour of Dickens is essentially a humour of characters."\* Humour is produced by comic situations as well as by comic characters, but in Dickens the main contribution to humour is made by the comic characters. Dickens has created a host of humorous characters, the chief of them being Mr. Pater Magnus, Mr. Guppy, Mr. Jack Hopkins, Mr. Todgers, Mr. Toots, Mrs. Gamp, Miss Nipper, Mr. Barkis and Mr. Pumblechook. They are all humorous figures, and though their oddities have been exaggerated by the novelist to make them funny, yet they cannot be dismissed, as some critics have done, as mere caricatures. They have real life and vitality in them.

Dickens's humour is of a variegated type. It is satirical, farcical, and genial. Satirical humour is produced at the cost of officials, lawyers, fashionable people and bigwigs. As Clutton Brock once remarked, "Every one who fell into routine, who seemed to act inexpressively and with no sense of the fun of life was turned by him into a marionette." These formal and affected beings are subjected to ridicule. They are hit with a bludgeon. Their weak points are banteringly exposed till they smart and seek to hide their shame from public gaze.

The novelist imparts the touch of genial humour to lovable simpletons like Micawber, Sam Weller, Pickwick and Toots. They are fine humorous figures and so long as we are in their company we feel light-hearted. The blues of life are swept away in their presence. Cares and anxieties cannot attack us after making association with the happy-go-lucky Macawber.

Dickens is thus the master of both the satirical and genial humour. "But Dickens's unique position as a humorist" says David Cecil, "lies in his mastery of 'pure' humour, jokes that are funny not for the satirical light they throw, but just in themselves."

In Dickens, humour is often combined with pathos. Laughter and tears lie cheek by jowl in his writings. It is in Dickens that we find the illustration of Bunyan's pregnant remark. "Somethings are of that nature as to make one's fancy chuckle,

while his heart doth ache."

What is the secret of Dickens's success as a humorist? The secret lies in his strong and curiously childlike imagination, his astonishing energy and vitality, and the tremendous surge of life. His wide sympathy and understanding of poor life also accounted for his success as a humorist. "Nor would he, perhaps, have been a humorist at all, if he had not also that extreme sensibility which makes him quicken to any warmth of heart. With his very clear and simple outlook upon men and affairs, his militant temper, his great energy he might simply have been one of the most forceful and perhaps one of the crudest of our satirists. But he was always swept forward on a wave of sympathy and pity. He was a waif who suddenly found himself in possession of a magic wand and remembering his own life in the dark streets, waved that wand so that everybody might share, with laughter and tears, the life of vast multitudes of the poor and simple."\*

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**Q. 56. Comment on the element of pathos in the novels of Charles Dickens.**

**Ans.** Dickens was the master of humour and pathos, and "laughter and tears lie closely together in his writings and frequently invade one another's territory."\*\* Dickens had a natural gift for homely pathos. He produced pathetic situations and pathetic characters strong enough to wring tears from human eyes. Pathos, in his novels, rises either by the presentation of the unhappy and miserable lot of children and their death or by the portrayal of the heart-rending conditions of factory workers and prisoners in Marshalsea prison. The unhappy and miserable state of Pip in *Great Expectations*, David in *David Copperfield*, Oliver Twist in *Oliver Twist*, Little Nell in *Old Curiosity Shop* inevitably leads us to sympathise with their unhappy existence. The experiences of David Copperfield under the tyrannical control of his step father Mr. Murdstone are extremely moving and pathetic. The same is true of Little Nell wandering with her aged

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\* J. B. Priestley : English Humour.

\*\* Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

grand father through churchyards and villages. Further, the deaths of children create tender feelings for their untimely demise and make even unaccustomed eyes to pay their humble homage of tears at the death of little flowers nipped in the bud. The death scenes of Paul Dombey and Little Nell have caused endless tears. They are written in such a pathetic strain that it is almost impossible to restrain tears trickling down the human cheeks. "These concluding scenes are so drawn that human language, urged by human thought, could go no farther in the excitement of human feelings." Dickens's letters to his wife are full of references to friends crying or being thrown 'into a dreadful state' by reading the death scenes of Nell and Paul Dombey.

Dickens wrung pathos by presenting pathetically the unhappy lot of prisoners. The death of the Chancery prisoner in *Pickwick* is truly pathetic.

As a master of pathos, Dickens followed the example of Goldsmith, Sterne and Richardson. They were his masters in the art of producing pathos bordering on sentimentality. Moses, uncle Toby and Pamella are the precursors of the pathetic-cum-humorous characters of Dickens.

A charge is brought against the pathos of Dickens. It is alleged that Dickens protests too much in his pathos and overdraws pathetic situations. In doing so, he loses reality and becomes mawkish and sentimental. David Cecil in *Early Victorian Novelists* is highly critical of Dickens's pathos. He says, "Dickens had a natural gift for homely pathos. But almost always he sins flagrantly against both the canons which govern its use. He overstates. He tries to wring an extra tear from the situation; he never lets it speak for itself. One would have thought the death of an innocent and virtuous child should be allowed to carry its own emotion, but Dickens cannot trust us to be moved by Little Nell's departure from the world unassisted by church bells, falling snow at the window, and every other ready made device, for extracting our tears that a cheap rhetoric can provide."\* W. L. Cross is of the same opinion. He remarks, "The effect of Dickens's pathos has, during the lapse of a half century, undergone change; it seems to be of a fanciful world

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\* David Cecil: *Early Victorian Novelists*.

far removed from the actual. It no longer moves to tears, but awakens rather a pleasing aesthetic emotion because of its poetic qualities, most completely manifest in the marvellous description of Paul Dombey's death.\* Hugh Walker says, 'There is a good deal in Dickens that offends a critical taste, and not the least his pathos, but this too we find to have been perfectly acceptable to the critic as the general reader in his own day.'

George Eliot was of the view, "Dickens scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness."

Dickens's pathos has the capacity to move us to tears if we are a little inclined towards sentimentalism. The modern verdict is that the pathos of Dickens is overdone and too long drawn out and that it shows a lack of self-restraint.

**Q. 57.** "Inseparable from Dickens's gift of humour is that of pathos." Discuss.

**Ans.** Unlike Richardson who has no humour, who minces words and dotes on the sentimental vows of his heroines, Dickens stands as the greatest humorist in English fiction. Humour is the stuff and substance of Dickens's mental constitution and the essence of his art. It is as a humorist that Dickens made his mark in English fiction. Gissing appropriately remarks, "Without his humour, he might have been a vigorous advocate of social reform but as a novelist assuredly he would have failed.....As a story-teller pure and simple, the powers that remain to him, if humour be subtracted, would never have ensured popularity. Humour is the soul of his work. Like the soul of man, it permeates a living fabric which, but for its creative breath, could never have existed."

As a humorist Dickens stands supreme among English novelists and his place is next to Shakespeare. No doubt Dickens could never create a great comic character like Falstaff, but by his comic fecundity of imagination he could delineate "a

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\* W. L. Cross : Development of the English Novel.

whole population of drolls." There are nearly a hundred characters in *Pickwick* alone and nearly all of them are comic. His comic characters unveil the fact that Dickens's humour is broad, humane, and creative. While the humour of Thackeray consists in intellectual wit and suggestiveness and the humour of Somerset Maugham is ironical, Dickens's humour is not far away from farce. Gissing says, "As a writer of true farce I suppose Dickens has never been surpassed." Dickens's humour does not reflect the intellectual repartee of Benedick and Beatrice, but it creates uproarious, vivacious and rocking laughter.

Dickens extracted humour out of his characters as we extract juice from orange. By his rich imagination he invented comic characters who give life and blood to his novels. "Dickens lives chiefly now in his comic characters, but these are so numerous, so astonishing, so altogether delightful, that a writer could hardly wish for a better hold upon posterity." It is impossible to forget his comic figures like Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Gamp, Sam Weller, Mr. Toots, Mr. Guppy, Mr. Sapsea, Mr. Peter Magnus and Mr. Pumblechook. No doubt in the description of the physical traits of his characters. for example the fatness of Sam Weller and the caricature-like description of Mr. Pumblechook—"a large hard breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes, and standy hair standing upright on his head, so that he looked as if he had just been all but choked and had that moment come to;" (*Great Expectations*)—Dickens has created humour, but we are amused to the core of our heart when we hear their funny talks. Mr. Micawber's remark, "Something good is round the corner;" Mrs. Gamp's remark, "Rich folks may ride on camels but isn't so easy for them to see out of a needle's eye" create guffaws of laughter. Mr. Toots falls in love with Miss Dombey but his love is not encouraged as he says, "I know I am wasting away." Mr. Toots states, "Burgess & Co. (tailors) have altered my measure, I am in that state of thinness. If you could see my legs, when I take my boots off, you will form some idea of what unrequited affection is." In this way, the thinness of his legs is the result of his unrequited love. Mr. Pumblechook in *Great Expectations* is also a humorous character. His

conjecture about burglary in the house of Mrs. Joe creates laughter. "Mr. Pumblechook made out, after carefully surveying the premises, that he had first got upon the roof of the forge, and had then got upon the roof of the house, and had then let himself down the kitchen chimney by a rope made of his bedding cut into strips."

Dickens's humour is satirical as well as sympathetic. He despised hypocrisy, vanity, greed, insolence of men and women and he satirised and exposed those characters who practised unfair means. In the character of Mr. Bumble he satirised all selfish dispensers of public charity. In the character of Mr. pecksniff he exposed hypocrites. But his villains do not give the impression of that humour which we find in 'the creations of his sympathetic humorous characters.' "These, the Micawbers, the Wellers, Pickwick, Toots, and the rest, are always lovable simpletons, who ask for and receive the laughter of affection."

Like Smollett, Dickens showed the humour of funny and ludicrous faces. 'He was delighted, too, by the humour of old tricks of speech, like the jerky, machine-gunning staccato, conversation of Mr. Jingle, and the ungrammatical circumlocutions of the uneducated in sentences from which they can only extricate themselves by means of more and more relative clauses. He went far behind Smollett in the supreme sophistication which can see childish fun in the contrariness of inanimate objects. The 'Veskitt' button that won't button was something new in English literature—it suggests something of the Russian Gogol. Dickens exploited to the full the absurdity of the apt or ludicrous unsuitable name, and he loved to mock the humour of the professional outlook—the overriding egotism which makes an undertaker say that a beautiful funeral is something to reconcile us to the world we live in."

Dickens's gift of humour is inseparable from his gift of pathos. Like the *Essays of Elia* the novels of Dickens are replete with a happy agglomeration of humour and pathos. Humour with Dickens is never far from tragedy. Through his tears we may see the rainbow in the sky; for his humour and pathos cannot be separated from each other. The quaint comment of

John Bunyan is perfectly applicable to Dickens, "Some things are of that nature as to make one's fancy chuckle while his heart doth ache."

In his life time Dickens's vein of creating pathetic scenes was highly praised by contemporary critics. Macaulay shed tears over Florence Dombey. Jeffrey wrote to Dickens that he had cried and sobbed over the death of Paul and felt his heart purified by the tears. Thackeray was astonished by the heart stirring death scene in *Dombey and Sons*. He exclaimed, "There's no writing against this; one has n't an atom of chance. It's stupendous." Ruskin was moved to the depths by the death of little Nell in *Old Curiosity Shop*. But the modern attitude towards Dickens's use of pathos is not that of admiration and adoration. It is generally considered as "preposterously overdone, cheap, sentimental, melodramatic and maudlin." Prof. Hugh Walker puts forth the modern reaction against his pathos in these words, "Generalised, the modern verdict is that the pathos of Dickens is overdone and too long drawn out, and that it shows a lack of self-restraint. In short, in his pathos he follows his usual literary practice of exaggeration. His humour rests on exaggeration; and he chose to set up his pathos on the same basis. The question therefore is, did he obtain results artistically as good as he obtained in his scenes of humour? His contemporaries answered; yes men of a later day, with few exceptions, say no."

Lord David Cecil has pointed out that the novelist should take care "that the emotion he extracts from his pathetic situation is inevitable inherent in it, and secondly that he is not overstating it." If the novelist attempts to exploit the emotion of his readers by a cold-blood and sterile process and over-emphasis, "he will be nauseated instead of being touched." His appeal will not be responded, and the pathetic situations will give the impression of theatrical performance. The pathetic scenes created by Virgil and Shakespeare could extract sympathy and tears out of their readers merely because there were "no exaggeration, no dwelling upon the subject, no beating out thin." But the case is quite different with Dickens. Dickens "wallows naked in the pathetic." Albert says, "His devices are often third-rate, as when they depend upon

such themes as the deaths of little children, which he describes in detail. His genius had little tragic force. He could describe the horrible, as in the death of Bill Sykes; he could be painfully melodramatic, as in characters like Rosa Dartle and Madame Defarge; but he seems to have been unable to command the simplicity of real tragic greatness."

We come to the conclusion that the humour and pathos of Dickens are co-related, and that they are the outcome of exaggeration, over-emphasis and hypersensitive imagination. Compton Rickett rightly remarks, "There are no great depths to his imagination as there are in Shakespeare and Milton, no such subtleties as in Meredith and Thomas Hardy, but for acute *sensibility* he has no peer in English letters. Thus both humour and pathos alike are rich in inventive fancy."

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**Q. 58.** Write a comprehensive essay on Dickens's characters and his art of characterisation.

**Ans.** Dickens's interest lay in characters rather than incidents. He was a master in the art of characterisation and presented a wide variety of characters in his novels. In a way Dickens's, to borrow Dr. Johnson's remark for Fanny Burney, was the 'greatest character monger' among the Victorian novelists. He had that joy in the varieties of character that Chaucer and Shakespeare had, and to a degree shared by none but these great masters of art.

"In Dicken's novels we come across three or four widely different types of character, first the innocent little child like Oliver, Joe, Paul, Tiny Tim and Little Nell, appealing powerfully to the child love in every human heart; second the horrible or grotesque foil, like Squeers, Fagin, Quilp, Uriah Heep and Bill Sykes; third the grandiloquent or broadly humorous fellow, the funmaker, like Micawber and Samweller; and fourth, a tenderly or powerfully drawn figure, like Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*, and Sydney Carton of *A Tale of Two Cities* which rise to the dignity of true characters."\*

It has been alleged that Dickens's characters are conceived

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\* W. J. Long : English Literature.



as caricatures rather than living human beings with the note of reality and solidity about them. This feeling rises due to the fact that he exaggerates the oddities and eccentricities of his characters to such a degree that they appear to be caricatures. "As in the treatment of fact, so in character-building, the essence of Dickens's art is grotesque exaggeration. Like Smollet, he was on the lookout for some oddity which for his purpose he made more old than it was."\* His Micawber, Picksniff, and Mrs. Gamp appear to be caricatures rather than real human beings.

The reason why the characters of Dickens appear to be like caricatures is perhaps due to the fact that while portraying his characters Dickens lays greater emphasis on their individuality. As Trollope shows living man in his social relations, and Dostoevski as soul aspiring to God, so Dickens shows his characters as individuals. Walter Allen defends Dickens against the charge of creating caricatures. He says, "Dickens's characters are often said to be caricatures or to be exaggerated. I do not think this is true : they are all so sharply differentiated from one another as to be plainly the product of intense accuracy of observation. But the intense observation is that of the child or rather of some one who has kept the eye of childhood."\*\* Even his caricatures live in their own right and are delightful in their own way. They are not pale shadows, but living beings, each marked with certain peculiarities of their own. "His books are like mobs, huge seething chaotic mobs, but mobs in which there is no face like another, no voice but reveals in its lightest accents a unique unmistakable individuality."† Dickens's characters are not real" as life is "real". If they were, they would be bad art, for literature is not life.' "There is nothing like them in life write Batho and Dobree, "but life is poorer for being without them. If Providence did not create Mrs. Gamp, Chadband and the rest of them, it ought, we feel, to have done so."

"What he meant by his characters it was a habit of Dickens to indicate by the names he gave them; as Lord Muntanhed, the Artful Dodger, the Barnacles, and Mr. Hamilton Veneering. They

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\* W L, Cross : Development of the English Novel.

\*\* Walter Allen : Six Great Novelists.

† David Cecil ; Early Victorian Novelists.

are, all of them, humorous, highly idealised, and yet retaining so much of the real that we recognise in them some disposition of ourselves and of the men and women we meet. The number of these humorous types that Dickens added to fiction runs into thousands ; it is by far the largest single contribution that has ever been made.”\*

Dickens's characters are not merely individuals but also symbolic figures. Some of his characters are like the humours of Benjonson, but through their humours, their traits have been universalised. “Thus Picksniff is not only Mr. Picksniff, he is the type of all hypocrites; Mrs. Jelyby is not only Mrs. Jelyby, she is also the type of all professional philanthropists; Mr Sergeant Buzfuz is the type of all legal advocates. Like the writers of the old moralities, Dickens peoples his stage with virtues and vices, and like them he does it gaily, presenting them as no frigid abstractions, but as clowns and zanies thwacking their bladders, exuberant in motley and bell.”\*\*

Dickens adopted the method of investing his individual as well as symbolic characters with a distinctive utterance which is used by that character and by no one else. His eccentric as well as sane characters are invested with a peculiar mode of speech. We at once recognize Mrs. Gamp from the rhythm of her speech.

He had another method of giving individuality to his characters. He had a great knack for ‘tagging’ his characters. Sometimes the tag is physical as in the case of Mr. Carker's teeth or uncle Pumblechook, and sometimes it is a speech-tag like, “I never will desert Mr. Micawber” or John Jarndyce's frequent reference to the east wind.

Dickens was a past master in drawing characters drawn from the poor classes of society or the middle class, for his knowledge of these classes was personal. He failed to portray characters drawn from aristocratic or upper circles of society for his knowledge about them was deficient. He did not possess the Shakespearean imagination of depicting characters drawn from kings, nobles, lords even without having acquaintance or knowledge about them. When he came to the upper class society he

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\* W. L. Cross : Development of the English Novel.

\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

failed and his characters drawn from that life seemed to be theatrical rather than real. Miss Havisham in *Great Expectation*, and Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield* are unreal and theatrical figures. "Society, he did not know at all, and above the rank of the lower middle class his knowledge grew more and more scanty. The assertion that he could not delicate a gentleman in the conventional sense of the word is substantially true."\*

The charge that Dickens could not draw a gentleman has not been accepted by Gissing. "I cannot fall in with the common judgment that Dickens never shows us a gentleman. Twice, certainly, he has done so, with the interesting distinction in one (John Jarndyce) he depicts a gentleman of the old school, and in another Mr. Crisparkle, a representative of the refined manhood which came into existence in his later years. "In John Jarndyce I can detect no vulgarity; he appears to me compact of good sense, honour and gentle feeling. Mr. Crisparkle has breezy manner, athletic habits, pleasant speech and they give no bad idea of the classical tutor who is neither an upstart nor a pedant."\*\* The truth seems to lie midway. Dickens could not certainly portray characters belonging to the aristocratic classes, but he could picture characters in whom qualities of dignity, honour and honesty were well embodied.

Dickens could not portray serious characters in whom spirituality and chivalry were embodied. Psychologically complex characters were beyond his range and scope. He treated his characters from 'without', without going to the heart of them. He stands contrasted with George Eliot in this direction. But he excelled all novelists of England in portraying humorous, gay, eccentric and whimsical characters. They are his masterpieces. Micawber, Sam Weller, Pickwick, Winkle are unforgettable figures for in them there is something of abnormality and whimsicality.

"A third type of character which Dickens developed, and which in his time made immensely for his popularity, was that of the victim of society—usually a child. The possibility of childhood for romance or pathos had been suggested by Shakespeare, by Fielding and by Blake; but none of these had brought children

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\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

\*\* Gissing : Charles Dickens.

into the very centre of the action, or had made them highly individual.”\*

In fact, as Compton-Rickett says, “Dickens is capital at a baby.” His child characters, David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Paul Dombey, Tiny Tim, Little Nell are all real and sympathetically drawn. The fact is that Dickens did not describe a child—he became a child for the time being. He lived over again his own days of childhood in his child characters and that is why they are so real, moving and life-like without any theatricality about them. “Of Dicken’s true and deep sympathy with childhood there can be no doubt; it becomes passionate in the case of little ones doomed to suffering by a cruel or careless world.”\*\*

The female characters of Dickens have been regarded as feeble or artificial. Women in love have been portrayed with little understanding of sex-life. The tragedy of sensitive, ill-used children is a tragedy that Dickens could draw with force, tenderness and imaginative insight, but the tragedy of love, the tragedy of fitful passion, of futile affections, the tragedy of Juliet, of Maggie Tulliver, of Tess, is outside his range altogether. He could only deal successfully with eccentric women like Betsy Trotwood, Miss La Creevy, and Miss Pross. In his women characters we find him at his best when shrewd observation, rather than psychological analysis is called for. Taken on the whole, we must pronounce Dicken’s women characters as defective, except where they are either eccentric or disagreeable.

Dickens’s main villains are Fagin, Sykes, Uriah Heep, Scrooge and Quilp. They are horrible figures and are bent on evil. The moral sense of Dickens does not allow them to go scot free at the end. They are accorded condign punishment. The villains are presented in their villainies so that guileless persons may be prepared against their crooked and treacherous ways by understanding their nefarious modes of operation. They are exposed at the end. But all the same we do not hate these villains. “For to hate Sykes, Fagin, Uriah Heep, Scrooge, and all the other villains, freaks and misfits who whine and roar their way through his books, is really to love them, because they are

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

\*\* George Gissing : Charles Dickens.

tangible, they take us by the heart, and enlarge our acquaintance not only with humanity as it is, but as it might become if life should but take another slant.' \*

Lord David Cecil directs our attention to the defects in Dickens's characterization in *Early Victorian Novelists*—"Dickens often fails over his characters. His serious characters, with a few brilliant exceptions like David Copperfield, are the conventional virtuous and vicious dummies of melo-drama. He cannot draw complex, educated or aristocratic types. And, what is more unfortunate, even in his memorable figures he shows sometimes an uncertain grasp of psychological essentials. He realises personality with unparalleled vividness; but he does not understand the organic principles that underlie that personality. So that he can never be depended upon, not to make some one act out of character. Montague Tigg, that harmless good companion, turns without a word of warning into a sinister conspirator; Mr Micawber, king of congenitally inefficient optimists, is transformed by a wave of Dickens's wand into a competent magistrate. It is, as though, in the last chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen were to inform us that Mr. Collins, became the secret paramour of Lady Catherine de Brough."\*\*

"Finally, there is what Gissing calls his inability, to 'develop character through circumstance.' He progressed towards this end also in his later novels, and in *Pip* he had at least on striking success. But in general, he does fail here. Yet when I say that he fails I am merely meeting the heathen on their own ground, for a man cannot fail at what he has never set out to do. As Chesterton might say, his characters often fail as human beings but they rarely fail as gods. Adopt the under realistic ideal, develop your characters through circumstance, subject them to the vicissitudes of existence, and what is the result? If you succeed, you have created a semblance of life. But Dickens was creating more than life; he was creating immortality. The characters described in a realistic novel are dead when the book is over, but nobody is dead in Dickens who was ever alive. Pecksniff and Mrs. Nickleby illustrate the curious paradox that external life

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\* Richard Church : *The Growth of the English Novel*.

\* David Cecil : *Early Victorian Novelists*.

on this planet is the exclusive prerogative of those who have never lived in the flesh, they go on for ever in a land beyond a land. And they could not do that if they were not in some sense as Dickens's detractors point out static characters."\*

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**Q. 59.** Write a note on Dickens's descriptive power and style.

**Ans.** Dickens's descriptive power is best presented in the descriptions of Nature and countryside. "This power of suggesting a country atmosphere is remarkable in Dickens. He hardly ever mentions a tree or flower by its name; he never elaborates—perhaps never even sketches—a landscape, yet we see and feel the open air surroundings. The secret is his own delight in the road and the meadow, and his infinite power of suggestion in seemingly unconsidered words." (Gissing). The backgrounds are painted with an ample brush, and the lavishness of details breathes a kind of exhilaration. His descriptions of journeys from country to town abound in rich observation. External appearances are described with gusto. The inner workings of the mind and mental states are left untouched.

"Dickens is one of the masters of prose, but in a sense that carries qualification. He cannot be compared with Thackeray for flow of pure idiom, for command of subtle melodies. He is often mannered to the last point of endurance; he has one fault which offends the prime law of prose composition. For all that he made unique use of the English language."\*\*

In the beginning Dickens possessed admirable qualities. He commanded vigour, variety and a soundness of construction. Dealing for the greater part with vulgarity, his *Sketches by Boz* is free from vulgarity. It is never allowed to be slovenly. "Slovenly English he never wrote; the nature of the man made it impossible."†

The highest quality of Dickens's style is movement. He was the master of a racy narrative. In the story of *David Copperfield's*

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Wagenknecht : Cavalcade of the English Novel,

David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

George Gissing : Charles Dickens.

journey on the Dover road, we have as good a piece of narrative prose as can be found in English.

Dickens often wrote metrical prose. The five-foot cadence is flagrant in the following lines from the *American Notes*—"But bring him here, upon his crowded deck/strip from his fair young wife her silken dress/ Pinch her pale cheek with care and much privation" and so on. One is inclined to feel that Dickens did it deliberately as an improvement on plain prose.

But Dickens could write plain prose without metre when he chose. In *Barnaby Rudge*, his style is simple, direct and forcible. "There are no interruptions of metre; the periods are flowering, the language is full of subdued energy."

Dickens had the art of suggestion at his command. He could both suggest and describe graphically. He could be poetic in his descriptions whenever he liked, particularly in the death scene of Little Nell.

"When Dickens writes in his pleasantest mood of things either pleasant in themselves or especially suggestive of humorous reflection his style is faultless, perfectly suited, that is to say, to the author's aim and to the matter in hand."\*

"I suppose there is no English writer, perhaps no writer in any literature, who so often gives proof of minute observation. It is an important source of his strength; it helps him to put people and things before us more clearly than, as a rule, we should ourselves see them."\*\*

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**Q. 60. Write an essay on Dickens as a representative Victorian Novelist.**

**or**

**What features of the Victorian Novel are present in the works of Dickens ?**

**Ans.** Literature reflects the spirit of the age out of which it springs. There are only a few artists who can escape the influence of the spirit of the age. Generally speaking an artist is a product of his age. The only difference between a great artist

**George Gissing: Charles Dickens,**  
**Ibid.**

and an ordinary artist is that the former rises above the limitations imposed on him by the age whereas the latter fails to rise beyond it. Shakespeare belongs as much to the Elizabethan age as any other Elizabethan dramatist; but he is great, because he manages to rise higher than the limitations that might well have been imposed on him by his age.

The position of Dickens resembles that of Tennyson. He would have been a greater poet, had he not cared so much for the age in which he lived. But, on the other hand, it is doubtful if he would have been a poet at all, had he not been a Victorian. The same seems to be true of Dickens also. Almost all that is bad about Dickens belongs to his age. He represents the Victorian Age as much as Tennyson. The only difference is that of medium. The other might be that of art and craftsmanship.

Dickens is essentially a novelist of the Victorian London—the London of 1820's and 1830's. He presents the Victorian London in all its colours, with its squares and shops and offices and murky slums and prisons and clamorous thorough-fares, its churches striped with soot, its suburbs with their trim cottages and tidy gentle spaces of open country. In depicting the horrors of prison life or the abomination of private schools, his heart is moved and he presents them to his readers, surely for the better. He knew his people best and gave them what they wanted.

"Dickens never wrote down to his public. *He was a part of his public.* His books were not made; they were born. They were begotten by him of his public. He is like the primitive folk-bard in this."\*

But the difficulty with him was that he himself was too much of the age. Like the Victorian public, he was himself a sentimentalist. He failed to bring about any substantial social changes since he more or less agreed with the contemporary social institutions. He was not a revolutionary like Shelley or Shaw. This may lead the Marxists to claim that he disfigures reality and is a bourgeois artist. But this is the thing that makes him so thoroughly a Victorian. His novels are pen-portraits

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Wagenknecht : Cavalcade of the English Novel.



of the Victorian scene. They are coloured in the sentimentalism because the Victorians living in an age of doubts and disputes, saw everything through a coloured glass. To present the coloured, vague and hazy Victorian atmosphere, Dickens discoloured his own vision. He did in Rome as Romans do."

We have already discussed the problem of realism in the novels of Dickens in the previous question. We may here repeat that his novels, inspite of the white-flag of compromise, represent the Victorian age almost in toto. And, to be more emphatic about it, is not the white-flag of compromise itself a dominant feature of the Victorian Age of Chesterton's phrase? The Victorian compromise sums it all up.

Dickens is not only a representative novelist of the Victorian age, but he is also a typical Victorian novelist. Lord David Cecil points out some general characteristics of the Victorian novels. He says that the Victorian novels are an extraordinary mixture of strength and weakness. He illustrates this point with special reference to Dickens—all the more to our advantage. "There is," he says, "hardly a book of Dickens which is not deformed by false sentiment, flashy melodrama, wooden characters; as often as not the hero is one of them."

Speaking of the Victorian novels in general, Lord Cecil says, "Their stories consist of a large variety of characters and incidents clustering round the figure of a hero, bound together loosely or less loosely by an intrigue and ending with wedding bells." Nothing better can be called in evidence than *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. Most of the Victorian novels are novels of character and their plots are weak. This is what we find in Dickens also. The end of *Great Expectations* is a remarkable instance at hand. It is difficult to imagine any aesthetic justification for marrying Pip to Estella. "Dickens chooses," says Lord David Cecil, "a conventional plot, generally a highly unlikely one, and then crams it as by physical violence on to a setting and character with which it has no organic connection."

Further, the Victorian novels are also remarkable for their heavy moralisings and preposterously rhetorical style. The middle class morality is always a dominating feature of the Victorian

novels. Probably only in *Vanity Fair* we seem to go off the track. Dickens is thoroughly traditional in this respect. Thomas Hardy was greeted with abuses when he set out to break these taboos. But Dickens preferred to adhere to the public taste. Sex is carefully ruled out from the novels of Dickens since sex was a taboo in the Victorian age. It was the age of readers that did not tolerate Clare taking young girls across the stream and Dickens knew his public.

Then we have the heavy sentimental style. A modern novelist requires very few words to describe the external features of his characters. But the Victorians devoted pages to the descriptions of their characters. Even Thomas Hardy failed to shake off the influence of this what Mr. Bateson calls heavy—Gothic—Style. Dickens exhibits this peculiarity in almost all his novels. Here is a characteristic description :—

*“He was a bushy man of an exceedingly dark complexion, with an exceedingly large head, and a corresponding large hand. He was prematurely bald on the top of his head...”* (*Great Expectations*)

Deeper problems of human life are also ruled out from the scheme of the Victorian novels. This limitation is a characteristic feature of all the Victorian novelists, of Dickens no less. The most successful creations of the Victorian novelists are ‘Character-parts,’ sufferings of child life. Dickens is primarily interested in presenting the sorrows, sufferings and privations suffered by his child characters. The hardships borne by David Copperfield, under the tyrannical domination of Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone are brought out in a touchingly tender manner. We are inclined to shed tears for the lot of little David as he washes bottles and suffers the pangs of penury. A similar fate falls Oliver Twist, who again wins our sympathy for the cruel treatment meted out to him by parish administrators and mentors of Workhouses. When Oliver Twist asks for more food and is reprimanded by the dispenser, we feel sympathy for the poor boy. The lot of Pip in *Great Expectations*, in the earlier chapters, is equally touching and moves us to sympathy for him. The wanderings of Little Nell with her grand father are heart-rending and pathetic. Her death moves us to tears. Dickens, thus focusses attention, primarily in presenting the afflictions, woes and sorrows of children in his novels.

But the question is—"Why did he choose children?" The reason seems to be that by showing those poor little chaps exploited by the bourgeoisie and capitalists, he could perform his duties of a social reformer pretty satisfactorily. This might have been one of the important reasons since this was the easiest way of awakening the public conscience and consciousness against the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Moreover, Dickens chose the field that he knew. He did not step out of his chosen field. He knew the life of poor little children very well since he had seen it. That is why his characters of this sphere are convincingly interesting. We forget the element of exaggeration that sometimes creeps in their delineation. We know that the author is talking on behalf of little children that love to see everything in unique proportions.

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**Q. 62.** Write a note on the principal novels of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63).

**Ans.** W. M. Thackeray began his literary career by making contribution to periodicals and magazines. Among his works of fiction, the first significant achievement is *Barry Lyndon* (1884). It is a picaresque novel recounting in a vivid and flashing style the adventures of Barry Lyndon, a gambler, a drunkard, and a cheat. Barry Lyndon is an Irish adventurer of the eighteenth century.

The story has been narrated by Barry himself in the absolute faith that he has always been right, though every word that falls from his lips condemns him. "It is a superb mock heroic in defence of gambling which stands in the same relation to Thackeray's other works as does *Jonathan Wilde* to Fielding"\*

**Vanity Fair (1847—1848)**

The first great novel of Thackeray that at once brought him into prominence was '*Vanity Fair*, a novel without a hero. In this great work the artist presented realistically and graphically the life of the people of the upper middle classes round about the period of the Napoleonic wars ending in the battle of Waterloo.

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\* R. W. Church: Development of the English Novel,

The picture of the civilians in Brussels is presented with clear-sighted realism and sparkling irony. The seamy side of life with its ruts, rags and uncleanness finds its best expression in this novel. In Thackeray's own words we come across in *Vanity Fair* "a set of people living without God in the world, greedy, pompous men perfectly well satisfied for the most part and at ease about their superior nature." *Vanity Fair* is, in fact, a novel of society. It may be called an epic like *Tom Jones* of English life in the days when the air was filled with the rattle of sabres and the boom of guns on the battlefield of Waterloo.

This novel is formless without a logically connected plot. Incidents hang loosely. The episodes and the incidents of the novel centre round the activities of a few prominent characters such as Becky Sharp, Amelia, Joseph Sedley, Rawdown, Crawley and Dobbin.

The characters of this novel are mediocres. There is no hero of the dimension of Henry Esmond. All the male characters except Dobbin are wanting in heroic conduct. The charm of the book lies in the portrayal of the character of Becky Sharp, an extremely cunning and clever type of woman who knows how to make her way in the world by all possible methods. It is the character of Becky Sharp that gives to this novel its main significance. Becky Sharp provides 'a study in instinctive trickery, inherent duplicity and the supple energy of the eternal feminine—the adventures who scandalized and conquered her world, invincible in her defeats, insecure in her triumphs.'\*

The charge of cynicism is brought against Thackeray, for in this novel he belittles grand virtues by associating goodness with pettiness of character. Good people are represented as fools and the palm is carried away by the vicious and the wicked. The novelist gloats as he sings—

*How very weak the very wise*

*How very small the very great are.*

Not only is Thackeray cynical in *Vanity Fair*, but he is also a satirist. *Vanity Fair* is a satire on contemporary society exposing the foibles and weaknesses of the people of his times.

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\* Diana Neill : A History of the English Novel.

The style of *Vanity Fair* is flexible, trenchant and lively, sometimes impassioned and nobly eloquent.

**Pendennis (1848—50).**

The second novel of Thackeray *Pendennis* is almost autobiographical in character presenting an account of the activities of a young man, Pendennis, at school, at college, in the inn of court and at the club. The picture of Pendennis is satirical. Through the character of Pendennis the novelist presents the pitfalls of a career devoted to the pursuit of selfish ends. Pendennis is the embodiment of selfishness. "Pendennis is a profound moral study and the most powerful arraignment of well-meaning selfishness in our literature not even excepting George Eliot's *Romola* which it suggests."

**Henry Esmond (1852—1853).**

*Henry Esmond* is a great historical novel dealing with the reigns of William III (1689—1702) and Queen Anne (1702—1714). Thackeray had been in love with the 18th century as can be seen from his book *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*. This love for eighteenth century life is reflected in *Henry Esmond* and Thackeray successfully reconstructs the life lived in the reign of Queen Anne with all the glamour of literary brilliance moving round about Addison and Steele who figure prominently in the novel.

The chief merit of *Henry Esmond* lies in its plot construction and coherence. It is the only novel of Thackeray in which there is little formlessness and looseness of plot construction. "All other of his novels are broken, interrupted and meandering in their narrative" says Hugh Walker, "but Esmond is one of the most perfectly constructed stories in English language. It has no intricate plot and its unity from beginning to end, the harmony of the tone, the systematic progress of the narrative strikes every reader."

In the sphere of characterisation Thackeray achieves signal success. The characters of Henry Esmond, Lady Castlewood, Beatrix, are masterly portrayed. Henry Esmond is the Bayard of English fiction. He is noble and gentle though he may appear to be a prig to the readers. Beatrix is young and beautiful, coquettish

and sparkling, bent on making her way in the world. Lady Castlewood is saintly and motherly.

The style of *Henry Esmond* is stately, lucid, and dignified. The pictures of 18th century life are presented with vivid intensity of feeling. "Perhaps on the whole *Esmond* is written with a more sustained excellence of style than any of his other books; and the triumph seems all the greater when we bear in mind that this style was not his own, but the imitated style of an age long past."\*

*Newcomes* (1853-1855).

The story of *Newcomes* which is told by Pendennis centres round the character of Young Clive Newcome, a youngman of noble and generous impulses. He is the son of Colonel Thomas Newcome, an officer of the Indian Army in whom Thackeray has drawn an admirable portrait of a simple minded gentleman guided in his life by the principles of duty and honour.

*Newcomes* is Thackeray's most pathetic novel. It dwells upon pardon, renunciation, forgiveness, friendship and the separation of parents and children by sea and death. In *Newcomes* Thackeray's aim was to portray great and commanding goodness of heart in characters like Ethel and Colonel Newcomes in contrast to the cunning and shifty characters of the first two novels.

"*Newcomes* is a novel of sentiment or feeling possessing the finer spirit of Sterne. The death bed scene of Colonel Newcome in this novel is highly pathetic and the words of the colonel in the dress of the poor Greyfriars, are truly touching. *Adsum* has passed into the language of devotional sentimentality."

*Virginians* (Nov. 1857 to Sept. 1859).

In the *Virginians* the author relates the fortunes of the descendants of Colonel Henry Esmond, in particular of his two sons George and Henry and daughter Rachel.

*The Virginians* like *Henry Esmond* is a historical novel. It represents the life of the 18th century. It is marked with a note of sentiment and possesses the finer spirit of Sterne. The element of satire which had played such an important part in *Vanity Fair* becomes conspicuous by its absence in this work. Thackeray now centres his attention not on finding faults but in comm-

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\* Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.

ending good virtues of head and heart in characters like Harry Warrington.

*The Virginians* is formless and lacks unity. It is less a novel and more a discursive work interspersed with anecdotes and with experiments in the art of literary imitation. It is a work of patches and not an organic whole. The main charm of the novel lies in some half a dozen scenes of vivid drama. The best scene in the book is that in which Harry Warrington visits the home of his ancestors. Never has the sentiment of the returned traveller been so finely caught in fiction as Thackeray does in the representation of Warrington's reaction as he returns to his home. The setting of the novel is admirable and the fine dialogues through which characters are represented do credit to the author.

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**Q. 63.** Give your estimate of Thackeray as a Novelist throwing light on the various aspects of his art.

**Ans.** The Victorian Age is essentially the age of the novel. Some of the most gifted novelists of England—Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope—flourished during this period and enriched English literature by their vast literary output. Thackeray belonged to the early Victorians and his name is closely associated with that of his contemporary Dickens with whom he differed in many important respects. Thackeray chose to follow in the foot-steps of Fielding. From Fielding he borrowed not only his conception of plot construction but also his satiric portraiture of society in a manner extremely unflattering to the public.

**Plot Construction**—As a novelist Thackeray did not very much care for plot construction. In Thackeray's novels there is the absence of a coherent and unified plot. Most of his novels are rambling in their discourse and are very loosely constructed. Except for *Henry Esmond* the rest of Thackeray's novels are discursive and formless. Lord David Cecil is of the opinion that Thackeray "is a very uncertain craftsman. His hold on structure is very slack, he does not bother to weave the different strands of his theme together; loose ends dangle in the air, no careful revision has cut out the tufts of unnecessary material that have

accumulated during the hurry of first writing" This formlessness in Thackeray's plot construction was due to two reasons. First, during his times, the serial system of publication was in vogue which encouraged a want of coherence and looseness of construction. The early novels of Thackeray had been contributed to magazines and naturally they lacked that coherence which would have come if the novelist had penned them systematically for a whole novel. Secondly, Thackeray like Fielding had the habit of giving sermons and preachings, and he often intruded his personality as a moraliser and a preacher. The tedious moralising marred the unity and continuity of the plot. Though Thackeray had no definite system of philosophy like George Eliot which he wished to propound through his novels, yet the sudden and occasional popping up of the novelist disturbed the unity of the story and brought formlessness to the novel.

Thackeray's method of telling his story is an extension of Fielding. Fielding inaugurated the method of telling story in a leisurely manner sitting on his arm-chair. Lord David Cecil says, "However varied the vicissitudes through which the story moves, it is told by the same voice, with the same tricks of speech ; however different the characters and scenes he is drawing, they bear the signature of Thackeray's style of craftsmanship."

"The second distinguishing mark of Thackeray's method of presentation is the mood in which he writes. Told as they are openly in his person, the scenes of the story are inevitably steeped in the mood in which he regarded life in general and then in particular. The plain positive colours of the drama are refracted through the painted glass of Thackeray's mood. We see Sir Pitt Crawley's death, for instance, partly as a matter of grief as it seemed to Sir Pitt partly as a matter for congratulation as it seemed to his friends, but predominantly as a matter for sardonic irony as it seemed to Thackeray."

Irony plays a significant part in Thackeray's narration. Irony is the key-note of Thackeray's attitude towards life. Thackeray can be dramatic and pathetic and comic and didactic, but pathos, drama, comedy and preaching alike are streaked with the same irony. "Thackerayan irony, owing something sentimental



*in it to Sterne, something virile to Fielding, is essentially unlike either, warm, lazy, powerful, the irony of the elderly, experienced men surveying from his arm-chair in the evening of his days long memories of *Vanity Fair*."*

**Characters**—The characters of Thackeray's novels, particularly the characters of the early novels, are not of a very high order of excellence like that of George Eliot. He could not paint heroes in the sense in which Carlyle portrayed them. He achieved eminent success not in the presentation of heroes of noble and dignified characters, but in presenting adventures, cheats, sycophants and fools. His understanding of life in the seamy side was deep and he presented characters from that life with great fidelity. "I will not paint for you angels or imps," he wrote, "because I do not see them, the young man of the day whom I do see and of whom I know the inside and the out thoroughly, him I have painted for you and here he is, whether you like or not"

The characters of Thackeray are generally drawn not from the poor section of our community but from the high social circle. Dickens succeeded in presenting characters in whom simplicity, and devotion were personified. Thackeray could provide characters in whom snobbery, hypocrisy, false glitter had their fullest play. Though he excelled in the presentation of such characters, yet in his latter novels he made a definite improvement in his art and produced noble, good and great characters like Henry Esmond, Lady Castlewood, Colonel Newcomes, Henry Warrington etc.

David Cecil is of the view that Thackeray repeats his characters again and again. "His virtuous heroines, Amelia Sedley, Helen Pendennis, Lady Castlewood are the same people in different costumes. And not his virtuous heroines alone : all his chief characters can be grouped into a few categories." This statement cannot be accepted for there is a world of difference between Amelia and Lady Castlewood, Becky Sharp and Beatrice.

Another charge levelled against Thackeray's characterisation is that he painted only mediocre characters and was the apostle of mediocrity. This charge has been squarely met by Hugh Walker in the 'Literature of the Victorian Era.' He

says, "Thackeray was essentially a preacher and the substance of all his sermons is, cease to be content with mediocrity, intellectual or moral, learning its weakness, its worthlessness, its powerlessness for good, its fatal potency for evil " Thackeray presented the pictures of the four Georges who were mediocre men, but his object was to show, "how benumbing, how degrading, how deadly mediocrity is.\*

Comparing Thackeray's art of characterisation with that of Dickens Lord David Cecil says, "Dickens is interested in individuality. His great figures live in virtue of the characteristics in which they differ from their fellows. Thackeray's are equally alive; but they live in virtue of the characteristics they share. Nor are these, as with Scott, say, the common characteristics of a group. Thackeray is interested not in the variety, but in the species; not in men, but in man. His best characters do not play secondary roles in the story-like Mr. Gamp or Dandie Dinmont; each has its necessary contribution to make towards the total impression." "Thackeray was showing individuals and not types." (Church).

Thackeray's characterisation of women was considerably hedged by the limitations of his age. The Victorians were stern moralists and viewed with disfavour any sexual aberration or representation of hot-blooded passion. That explains why Thackeray's women are cold and, inspite of their heart bubbling with passion, as in the case of Beatrix, appear to be stone cold.

**As a Realist**—Thackeray restored to English fiction a *sober actuality* and *stolid realism* which it had lacked and missed for many years. Though Dickens lulled us by the familiarity of his settings into the belief that he was a realist, yet his realism lay on the surface only and his pictures of London life were magnificent pieces of idealised descriptions, sometimes as fantastic as a passage from *Notre Dame*. Thackeray stood against the illusory semblance of realism. "His principle," says Cross, "was that he must accept the world as he found it." It was his object to represent life or a certain phase of it as truly as it was "not irradiated by the glow of romance nor brightened

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\* Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.

by the rosy spectacles of sentiments." Thackeray painted realistically the life he knew. He himself said, "I have no brains above my eyes ; I describe what I see." His pictures of life, particularly in the seamy side are accurate and true. Contrasting the realism of Dickens and Thackeray, Lord David Cecil makes the pregnant observation in the *Early Victorian Novelists*—"Dickens's imagination is a distorting glass turning to grotesque comedy or grotesque terror the world that it reflects ; Thackeray's is a kaleidoscope, shaking the coloured fragments of his observation into a symmetrical order, round the centre of a common canon of conduct." The realism of Thackeray is very much different from that of Zola and the French Naturalists. "He does not attempt to reproduce with a photographic accuracy all the facts, important and unimportant, that make up the surface of any scene like Zola. He sedulously selects from those he thinks the most significant. And even these he does not represent with the unemphasised plainness of Trollope, In the visible as much as in the moral world he accentuates the traits which in his view give his model its individuality, heighten the light, darken the shadows."\*

In the *Vanity Fair* a complete picture of real life has been presented with great art. In order to appreciate the realism of his work one has to understand all the customs that were prevalent in those days. Lord David Cecil says, "The world that meets us in them was once the great humming, bustling, contemporary world we feel : but it is so no longer. Its hum is dwindled to a murmur, soon it will have subsided into final silence."

As a Satirist—Thackeray, the realist, could not help being a satirist. A realist is often a satirist as was Ben Jonson in the Elizabethan days. Thackeray employed satire for castigating the foibles of his times. Of all the satirists, Thackeray, after Swift, was the most gloomy. Even his countrymen have reproached him for depicting the world uglier than it was. In the *Book of Snobs*, the frailties of life in the upper classes of people are satirised mercilessly. In the *Vanity Fair* the tone of satire assumes fierceness, very much like that of Smollett.

As a Cynic—Since Thackeray chose to be a satirist and a

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\* Lord David Cecil : *Early Victorian Novelists*.

rabid castigator of the follies of human beings, he has been considered as a cynic. He depicted adventurers, sychophants with a glamour that betokened a perverted sense of human follies and brought the charge of cynicism on the author. Since some of his pictures of humanity were denuded of all virtues, it was assumed by his readers that he was a cynic having no regard for virtuous courses of life.

The fact is that Thackeray was no cynic. On the contrary he had a profound faith in the essential goodness of things and noble virtues as can be seen from the *New Comes* and *Virginians*. Trollope says, "He was one of the most soft-hearted of human beings, sweet as charity itself, who went about the world dropping pearls, doing good, and never wilfully inflicting a wound."\* He was full of charity, and "to give some immediate pleasure—a sovereign to a school boy, gloves to a girl, dinner to a man, a compliment to a woman—was the great delight of his life." The charge of cynicism, therefore, cannot stand against Thackeray. In this connection the remarks of Hugh Walker are apt. He says, "It is sufficient to appeal against the charge of cynicism to *Esmond* and to the *Round About Papers* and to ask what cynic ever conceived such a scene as the deathbed of colonel Newcome, or such a character as that of the man there passing to his account. To the true cynic human nature is not merely faulty but essentially mean; and a man who held such creed could have never drawn such a character as Colonel Esmond, the Bayard of English fiction."

As a Moralist—Besides being a realist and a satirist, Thackeray was also a moralist. "He is not content, like Shakespeare, to be simply an artist, to tell an artistic tale and let it speak its own message; he must explain and emphasize the moral significance of his work. There is no need to consult our own conscience over the actions of Thackeray's characters, the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice is evident on every page."

Thackeray's method of preaching was satirical and he was far more a profound moralist than Dickens. His moral sense never allowed the triumph of wicked characters. Perhaps that was

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\* Anthony Trollope : W. M. Thackeray.

the Victorian influence on Thackeray's art. He could not allow Becky Sharp to be triumphant at the end because that would have shocked the Victorian conscience. All the conquests of the dazzling Beatrix lead only to an unrespected age and a miserable death-bed in the end.

Sometimes Thackeray went out of his way to preach his morals. He disturbed the progress of the story, intruding his personality by some moral in his pocket to be given out without much demur to whosoever needed it. This sermonizing tone of his novels may not be appealing to the readers, but Thackeray could not help being a moralist and making his purpose clearly felt by his readers.

**Thackeray and His Age**—Lord David Cecil in *The Early Victorian Novelists* has shown at length that Thackeray's art as a novelist was considerably influenced by the conditions of his age. His genius was not in line with the thought of his age, but being a Victorian he was constrained to follow the Victorian ideals. He was, in fact, born at a wrong time. The Victorian insistence on morality; particularly in sex, spoiled Thackeray's portrayal of women particularly in their sex-life. He was inhibited where the portrayal of women or sex was concerned. The Victorian insistence that a man was either wholly good or wholly bad exercised its baneful influence on Thackeray's portraiture of man. Even in his worst sinners he saw glimpses of virtue. But conditioned by his age he could not present virtues in his vicious characters. That explains the complexity of the character of Becky Sharp. Thackeray wanted to import virtues to her and he did it at places. But ultimately the moral obsession and one-sided presentation of character either in its goodness or evil, came up before his eyes, and he spoilt the character of Becky by making her sinful at the end, so much so that she was led on to murder Joseph Sedley. All this was done under the influence of the age.

Diana Neill has beautifully touched the relation of Thackeray with his age and its impact on his art—"His weaknesses spring from the limitations imposed on him by the age in which he lived and from which he consciously suffered. His insight into the workings of human nature was profound, and its full expression required an atmosphere of freedom. But this freedom was

precisely what he lacked and, in consequence, a conflict developed between Thackeray's creative inspiration and the Victorian Age. The Victorian Age triumphed, with the result that the novelist was compelled to be false to his own genius. Thackeray's artistic perception of characters and situations was, within his range, infallible, but the power to set down what he saw was cramped by a somewhat pharisaical moral code. That he submitted so readily to his age is the measure of his weakness."\* There is much truth in Cecil's observation, "In the midst of Thackeray's subtlest melody, his richest passage of orchestration, there jars on our ears, faintly, a false note." "He was false to his central creative inspiration."

**His Style**—Thackeray has often been praised for his *style* in his novels, and for many purple passages of exquisite beauty. His style is graphic and at various times eloquent. Saintsbury remarks that "there is no phrase in English so nervous, so flutteringly alive, as Thackeray's." His style is extremely conversational, and even at its highest pitches it always seems to be addressed to a listener, rather than to be composed without reference to reading or hearing at all. There is no sense of turgidness in him, and his words seem to flow from his pen without any effort, like snow-water upon the mountain side. "He could no more restrain the current of his prose," says Charles Whibley, "than a gentle slope could turn a rivulet back upon its course. His sentences dash one over the other in an often aimless succession, as though impelled by a force independent of their author."\*\* But he possessed no economy of speech, and he never used one word if a page and a half could adequately express the meaning. At times Thackeray is guilty of inaccuracies and solecisms; but whenever he wanted, he could write with perfect artistry, lucidity, ease and artlessness as in *Henry Esmond* and *the Virginians*. In this respect Burton remarks, "Thackeray had the effect of writing like a cultivated gentleman not self-consciously making literature. He was tolerant of colloquial concessions that never lapsed into vulgarity, even his slips and

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\* Diana Neill : English Novel.

\* Charles Whibley : W. M. Thackeray.

slovenliness are those of the well bred. Thackeray has flexibility, music, felicity and deceptive ease. He had too the flashing strokes, the inspirational sallies which characterise the style of writers like Lamb, Stevenson and Meredith."

**Q. 64.** Give a brief account of the contribution made by the novelists of the school of Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray.

**Ans.** The mighty shadows of Dickens and Thackeray fell across the whole novel terrain. The example set up in the field of fiction was followed by a host of novelists, the chief of them being Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, George Borrow and Anthony Trollope. All the novelists save Anthony Trollope belong to the school of Dickens. Only Trollope is a close follower of Thackeray. We will now briefly describe their contribution to the Victorian novel.

**Charles Kingsley (1819—75)**

The main works of Charles Kingsley can broadly be divided into three classes. In the first group we can place his social studies and problem novels such as *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*. These two social sermons are red-hot ingots hissing with passion and indignation. In *Alton Locke*, he exposes the conditions in the sweated tailoring trade. The hero of this novel is a London tailor and poet. *Yeast* deals with the problems of agricultural labourers and game laws after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The novel exposes the weaknesses of Victorian agriculture through dialogues between the hero and various other characters. In the second class fall his historical novels, *Hereward the Wake*, *Hypatia* and *Westward Ho*. In *Hereward the Wake*, the novelist provides an account of Hereward the Wake, who was an outlaw, and possessed bravery and courage. In the earlier part of the book are given an account of his youth, his outlawry for robbing a monastery and his numerous exploits in England and Flanders. This novel is adventurous in tone and is free from anticatholic sentiment. *Hypatia* or *New Foes with an Old Face* is a dramatic story of Christianity in contact with paganism, having its scene laid in Alexandria at the beginning of

the fifth century. In this work he opposed Roman Catholicism, and tried to check the movement towards Rome. "Kingsley's hysterics against Romanism are now gay comedy, giving a pleasing relish to Hypatia. It is a beautiful lament over the passing of the gods." *Westward Ho* is a patriotic tale of adventure and naval enterprise during the times of Queen Elizabeth. It is a highly idealized picture of the Elizabethan sea rovers. The author's hatred for Jesuits and Roman Catholics is again voiced in this tale of adventure and national glory. The tale is replete with exciting scenes and moves with a buoyant zest reflecting with romantic exuberance the spirit of the early sea-rovers, Hawkins and Drake.

In the third group, are placed Kingsley's miscellaneous works such as *Water Babies*, a fascinating story of a chimney sweep, which mothers read to their children at bedtime,—to the great delight of the round eyed little listeners under the counterpane.

Lovett Hughes makes significant observations about Kingsley; "Kingsley is an important figure in English fiction because he represents ideals which were powerful in England between 1848 and 1870. He was the popular expounder of the doctrine of Carlyle, whose name appears frequently in his pages, and the spokesman for the Broad Church Muscular Christianity and Christian Socialism. Kingsley lacked a sense of humour, and his efforts to be funny failed painfully. He had, however, genuine imagination, and presented some scenes, such as that in which Hypatia was slain by the Christian mob of Alexandria at the altar of the great Basilica, with a vigour which has made them deservedly famous." He is a capital writer for boys and is best enjoyed in the uncritical days of youth. His work clearly reveals two characteristics viz his anti-Catholic sentiment and his zeal for reform,

"To the development of the Novel as such kingsley contributed little; he applied it to social and economic problems, to be sure, but others had done that before him. It is even doubtful that his novels had any important influence on the breakdown of structure so often apparent in later novels of ideas. But certainly



they themselves prefigure it.”\*

**Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65).**

The novels of Mrs. Gaskell can broadly be divided into two classes. In the first group we place her novels dealing with industrial and social life of the times. To this class belong *Mary Barton*, *Tale of Manchester Life* and *North and South*. In *Mary Barton*, she provides a realistic picture of the hardships and difficulties faced by labourers in the wake of the industrial Revolution. The work exhibits Mrs. Gaskell's first-hand acquaintance with the miserable and unhappy lot of labourers in industrial towns like Manchester. It is weak in plot, but is carried forward by the strength of its passionate sympathy with the downtrodden. Here Mrs. Gaskell appears as a follower of Dickens and the humanitarian note in this novel is well pronounced. *North and South* is also based on a similar theme. Its plot is better constructed. The tone of sympathy characterises this work.

To the second group belong *Cranford*, *Ruth*, *Wives and Daughters* and *Sylvia's Lovers*. Of these novels *Cranford* is undoubtedly her best work. It is a classic. “Here is described the old-style etiquette, the genteel poverty, the formal calls, and evening parties, of a village wholly in the possession of the Amazons, widows and spinsters, where no men are tolerated, except the country doctor, who is allowed to stay there occasionally overnight when on his long circuit. Old minds spend their time in tea-drinking and stale gossip, and in chasing sunbeams from their carpets.”\*\* “The sympathy, the keen observation, and the gentle humour with which the small affairs of a country village are described make *Cranford* one of the most delightful stories in the English language.”†

*Ruth* is ethical and psychological in character. The underlying doctrine of this work is stated by Mrs. Gaskell—“All deeds however hidden and long passed by have their eternal consequences.” *Ruth* announces the approach of the psychological novel which later on was perfected by George Eliot. Mrs.

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\* Wagenknecht : *Cavalcade of the English Novel*.

\*\* Cross : *Development of the English Novel*.

† W. J. Long : *English Literature*.

Gaskell could not be a successful psychological novelist. "Mrs. Gaskell did not possess the clearness of vision, the equipment of knowledge, and the breadth of horizon requisite for completely satisfying this definition of the psychological novel. What she did in part was fully accomplished by George Eliot." (Cross).

**Wives and Daughters** is an ironical study of snobbishness. It is remarkable for certain female portraitures such as Mrs. Gibson, and Cynthia Kirk Patrick.

**Sylvia's Lovers** is a moralistic love story in a domestic setting, with which scenes of wilder beauty and human violence are well blended, but the novel is spoilt by its unsatisfactory and rather melodramatic ending."

The writings of Mrs. Gaskell combine something of the delicate humour of Jane Austen with a moralistic intention not unlike that of George Eliot, but she is far less in stature than either. Her workmanship is too often uncertain, and her plots are generally weak and not infrequently melodramatic. Often the pathos, which she can handle with great effect, deteriorates into sentimentality, while her aim as a moralist leads her into preaching. Her style is simple, lucid, and unaffected, and at her best she has a delicate grace and charm. Gerald De Witt Sanders has beautifully summed up the contribution of Mrs. Gaskell to Victorian fiction in the following words :—

"Her chief general contributions to literature were those she made in the social novel and in the delineation of village life and customs in Victorian England. Her chief particular contributions were her incomparable characterizations of spinsters and doctors and servants, her excellent use of dialogue and dialect, and her sympathetic understanding of the views of English workmen. In the first of these she had no near rival in English literature ; in the second she did much to add to a realistic presentation of characters by giving a correct representation of their conversations; and in the last she set the mode of others, until in time men became recognized as human beings and not as worthless chattels. To have done any one of these things would have been to live, to have done all three, and to have done them well, will ensure her a lasting place among the worthies of English literary history."

**Charles Reade (1814–84)**

Reade was a dramatist, a novelist and a journalist. "He recognised no barriers between the drama and the novel; writing sometimes a play, and then turning it into a novel, and then again reversing the process."\* His novels were modelled on dramatic pattern, and he had always in his mind "the actors on the stage, and the galleries applauding." To one of his novels he gave the sub-title, 'A Dramatic Tale,' and referred to another as a 'Dramatic Story by Courtesy Novel.'

Reade used the novel for social reform, and followed closely on the heel of his master Dickens. His first novel *Peg Woffington* (1853) is a study of stage life from behind the scenes, and from the artistic point of view, is considered by Cross as, "the most perfect novel as a whole." *It is never too late to Mend* (1856) exposes the brutalities of the English prison system. *Hard Cash* (1863) is the author's most successful propagandist novel and is designed to attack the abuses prevailing in lunatic asylums. In *Foul Play* Reade exposed the practice of scuttling of ships in order to obtain insurance money. *A Terrible Temptation* is a study of social reforms and reformers. *Christie Johnstone* is "an attack on hero-worship, a fashionable cult of sham and humbug gods established by the most arrant of shams and humbings." On the whole Reade was a social reformer and he used the novel for humanitarian purposes. "He did not believe that fiction should be written simply to please, but that it should contain matter for instruction and edification."\*\*

Reade's masterpiece is *Cloister and the Hearth* (1861). It is one of the finest historical novels, and reconstructs the life of the people at the stirring period of the Renaissance. For writing this work he had 'to read not only volumes but book-shelves and libraries.' The fifteenth century life of Italy is presented in this novel. "The novel is a scholar's endeavour to restore to the imagination of the nineteenth century, the form and spirit of the fifteenth; to portray the dawn of the Renaissance, when mediaevalism with its asceticism and narrow outlook on life was just beginning to give way to the human feelings; mighty passions of friendship,

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\* Cross : Development of the English Novel.

\*\* Cross; Development of the English Novel

devotion, love, and jealousy, such as we have in the most splendid of Italian novelle."\* The story of the novel centres round Gerald and his adventures. It is a well-knit novel, and a story better composed, better constructed or better related than the *Cloister and the Hearth*, it would be difficult to find anywhere. "It has small resemblance to George Eliots' *Romola*, whose scene is laid in Italy during the same period; but the two works may be read in succession, as the efforts of two very different novelists of the same period to restore the life of an age long past."\*\*

"Why did Reade rise so far above his usual level in the '*Cloister and the Hearth*'? The answer is comparatively simple. He got hold here of a great tragic theme, and it was a theme on which he could feel deeply, for his own life had been cursed by enforced bachelorhood. Furthermore, since he was now writing of the past, he had a subject better adapted to his method of elaborate documentation than many contemporary subjects could be; and the material he worked with was vastly superior to the kind of thing he ordinarily clipped from the daily press and pasted into his scrap-books. For once he did not confine himself to the dramatic method but filled in an elaborate back ground; for once he used atmosphere freely. And for once he did not stop with describing his characters from the outside but entered intimately into all their joys and sorrows and set them forth on their own terms."†

**George Borrow (1803—1881).**

George Borrow was a minor novelist of the Victorian age. He adopted the picaresque novel of Smollet, and used it deftly for his purpose. "He had the faculty of seizing upon the picaresque elements in the world about him. He had the ready instinct of the discursive writer for what was dramatically telling." He was a romancer and perfected the novel of adventure in a telling style.

His principal works are *The Bible in Spain* (1843), *Lavengro* (1851), *The R. many Ray* (1857), *Wild Wales* (1862). *The Bible in Spain* recounts the adventures of Borrow in Spain from 1835 to

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\* Ibid.

\* W. J. Long: *English Literature*.

† Wagenknecht: *Cavalcade of the English Novel*.

1840. He had gone as an agent of the Bible society, and this book gives a vivid picture of the great disturbance that rose in Spain as the result of the Carlist troubles. The vivid picture that the author gives of Spain is unquestionably true and the work is one of the best of English books of travel. It is autobiographical in character.

*Lavengro* and *Romany Rye* are studies in gipsy life. In reading these books we are inevitably reminded of Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy*. *Lavengro* in gipsy language means 'philologist' and word-master. The author is Lavengro or word-master. The story is frankly autobiographical. *The Romany Rye* in gipsy language means Gipsy gentleman. It is again autobiographical and the name 'Romany Rye' was given to Borrow in his youth by Ambrose Smith. In this book, as in *Lavengro*, we have vivid descriptions of Borrow's wanderings and adventures. Both these works are "fictional autobiography", and the interest of these novels lies in the episodes and adventures. "The style is odd. It has a Biblical directness and poetic imagery. It can be as bald as the narrative style of Defoe. It can flare up into a most powerful prose, as in the account of the fight with the flaming Tinman in the dell. He commands attention and even enthusiasm, and may be called the father of a school of a semi-fictional writers."\*

"His books are remarkable in that they seriously pretend to tell the actual facts of the author's life, but how much is fact and how much is fiction will never be accurately known, so great is his power of imagination. Taken as mere fiction, the books exert a strong and strange fascination on many readers. They have a naive simplicity resembling that of Goldsmith, a wry humour, and a quick and natural shrewdness. As a blend of fact and fiction, of hard detail and misty imagination, of sly humour and stockish solemnity, the books stand apart in our literature."

**Richard D. Blackmore (1825—1900).**

He was the author of *Lorna Doone* (1869), *The Maid of Sker* (1872), *Cripps the Carrier* (1876). Of these novels the most popular is *Lorna Doone*. "The scene of this fascinating romance

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\* R. W. Church : *The Growth of the English Novel*.

is laid in Exmoor in the seventeenth century. The story abounds in romantic scenes and incidents; its descriptions of natural scenery are unsurpassed; the rhythmic language is at times almost equal to poetry; and the whole tone of the book is wholesome and refreshing. Altogether it would be hard to find a more delightful romance in any language, and it well deserves the place it has won as one of the classics of our literature.”\*

**William Wilkie Collins (1823—1839).**

Wilkie Collins is the close follower of Charles Dickens in humour and whimsicality though he did not aim at social reform. He wrote novels in which supernaturalism, sensationalism and mystery played notable part. He provided in his *The Dead Secret* (1857), *The Women in White* (1850), *No Name* (1862), *The Moonstone* (1868) matter for mystery and supernaturalism. He introduced the old Gothic material, and added the note of detection to the novel. He adopted the epistolary form popularised by Richardson and paved the way for the detective novels of Conan Doyle. These novels are full of jerks and jolts particularly when the reader is asked to transmit himself from the point of view of one character in the book to another. But the technical skill of the novelist in plot construction is always at the highest particularly in *The Moonstone*, where all the parts fit into one another with the neatness of those puzzled pictures that were at once the agony and delight of our childhood. There is not a scene which does not carry forward the tale, not a character that has not to play a vital part in the solution of the mystery. The atmosphere is charged with a haunting sense of mystery and fear. ‘Certainly it would be difficult to overpraise the ingenuity of this book; it has enough stuff in it for a dozen mystery stories as they go now a days.’

“Collins is skilful narrator. He has a love for story telling rather than for creating great characters. Hardy said of him, “He probably stands first, in England, as a constructor of novels of complicated action that depend for their interest on the incidents themselves and not on character.”

Collins’s main gift lies in creating atmosphere in his novels. They are as remarkable for their plots as for their atmosphere.

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\* W. J. Long : English Literature.

"It is on atmosphere that he relies for the thrills and chills" says Wagenknecht "which Reade gets through violent action. There is comparatively little action in his books."\*

"Collins specialised in the mystery novel, to which he sometimes added a spice of the supernatural. In many of his books the story which often ingeniously complicated, is unfolded by letters or the narratives of persons actually engaged in the events. To a certain extent this method is cumbersome, but it allowed Collins to draw his characters with much wealth of detail. His characters are often described in the Dickensian manner of emphasising some humour or peculiarity."

Wilkie Collins exercised a great influence on subsequent novelists. A whole school of sensationalists was indebted to him. Among those who were deeply influenced by Collins's art were Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, to say nothing of writers of contemporary mystery and detective stories. On a higher level he influenced Blackmore, Meredith, Hardy, Stevenson, Conrad and Arnold Bennett.

#### Anthony Trollope (1815-62).

Anthony Trollope is the only novelist who adopted the method and art of Thackeray. He can be regarded as a son of Thackeray without his father's genius.

"Trollope was a minute observer of life, and regarded the novel as a salutary and agreeable sermon preached to recommend the virtues and to discountenance the vices."\*\*

Trollope's fame as a novelist rests on his Barsetshire novels dealing with the imaginary country of Barsetshire and particularly in the ecclesiastical centre, Barchester. Trollope was particularly interested in the life of bishops and clergymen and his famous novel *Barchester Towers* (1857) is a close and faithful study of life in a cathedral town and "is remarkable for its minute picture of bishops and clergymen, with their families and dependents." This novel ought to be read together with *The Warden* (1855) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867), and other novels of the same series because in all of them the scenes and characters are the same and repeated with mechanical regularity. These novels

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\* Wagenknecht : *Cavalcade of the English Novel*.

\*\* Cross : *The Development of the English Novel*.

are the best expressions of Trollope's genius. His other important works are *Doctor Thorne* (1828), *Framley Passonge* (1861), *The Small House at Allington* (1864), *Phineas Redux* (1874).

"Trollope is a novelist of the middle and upper middle classes. With urbane familiarity and shrewd observation he presents an accurate, detailed picture of their quiet, uneventful lives in matter-of-fact way which gives his work the appearance of chronicles of real life. His main concern is with characters rather than plot, but his characters, though clearly visualized and described in great detail, lack depth, and Trollope never handles the profounder passions. The frame work of his novel is a series of parallel stories moving with the leisureliness of every day life. His style, efficiently direct, simple, and lucid, is seen to a particular advantage in his dialogue. A vein of easy satire runs through many of his novels and he makes skilful use of pathos. Within limited scope he is a careful craftsman who retains his popularity."

"For readers of to-day, Trollope's limitations would seem to be quite as valuable as his special powers. He was pedestrian; he was comfortably mid-Victorian. He was blind to some of our great social problems; others, through the accident of time, he was lucky enough never to encounter. But there are times when we are thankful to be able to turn to a writer who helps us to forget these problems, and who reminds us that the only ceaselessly interesting thing in the world is human nature."\* To Paul Elmer More the novels of Trollope seemed, "like an unfailing voice of encouragement in times of joy and prosperity; they have afforded solace in hours of sickness and adversity; they have lightened the tedium of idleness and supplied refreshment after the fatigue of labour."

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## Later Victorian Novelists,

**Q. 65. Give your estimate of Charlotte Bronte (1816-55) as a novelist and comment on her principal works.**

**Ans.** Charlotte Bronte was the eldest of the Bronte sisters who romanticised English fiction during the Victorian age. Instead of dealing with the manners and ways of an artificial society, she directed her attention to the inner working of the human soul, and revealed the passionate cry of the human heart in her works. She introduced poetry, passion and imagination in fiction and made it a thing of beauty and charm. She harnessed in the service of fiction the vitalising force of imagination and introduced the finest graces of romanticism in her novels mostly grounded on personal experiences of life.

Charlotte Bronte began her career as a poetess and then drifted on to the field of fiction. She wrote four novels in succession. Her fame rests on *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*. "There is emphatically a recurring pattern in Charlotte's literary carpet. As regards their matter: Yorkshire and Brussels, the governess, the tutor and the school are often repeated, interwoven with the cleric and the millowner. In manner a similar recurrence exists, for in all the novels except *Shirley*, the story is told in the first person. A deeper unity is achieved by the consistent theme, this is always the conflict between high integrity and worldliness."\* *The Professor*, her immature work, was published after her death in 1857. In this novel Charlotte Bronte focusses her attention on her impressions of Brussels life. It is autobiographical in character and the main figures of the novel are drawn from her personal acquaintance. The professor of the novel is William Crimsworth. He is the narrator of the story. He recounts his life from the time he quarrelled with his aristocratic uncles and became a professor in

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\* Phyllis Bentley : The Brontes

Pelets' boys school. Here he developed love with his half Swiss, half English pupil, Frances Evans Henri, and finally married her though his love was sought to be disturbed by Zoraide. In this novel, Heger, the lover of Charlotte, plays the part of the professor, and her own role is carried out by Frances Evans Henri.

This novel is *realistic* in character. At this stage Charlotte was of the view that "her story should be as far removed from the land of the Genii and as near to real life as it could possibly be." The realism of this novel was not appreciated. Charlotte realised that it was not realism but romance that the people of her times were really after, and in her subsequent novels, she produced works in which there was an overdose of romance, thrilling incidents and wild adventures.

*Jane Eyre* marks a change from realism to romance. This novel is undoubtedly the best of Charlotte's works. It is frankly autobiographical in character. It was first published under the name of Currer Bell; and the name of the author posed a problem for the public. Was the writer of the novel a man or a woman? It was later on revealed that it was a woman's work. *Jane Eyre* is Charlotte Bronte herself and the novel sets forth her experiences of life in a remarkably moving and touching style. "It is a powerful and fascinating study of elemental love, and hate, reminding us vaguely of one of Marlowe's tragedy."\* It is a lyric poem, the kind of poem written only in adolescence when excess is all and restraint is felt to be a self-betrayal.\*\*

In *Jane Eyre* there is a beautiful combination of realism and romance. Jane Eyre's life at Lawwood Asylum is a realistic portrayal of her own life at Cawan Bride school. The later part of the novel dealing with the experiences of Jane Eyre at Thornfield Hall is saturated with the spirit of romanticism. Thornfield Hall and Rochester are born of desire and imagination. The characters of the novel are vigorously drawn, and we are particularly attracted by the characters of Rochester and Jane Eyre.

\* W. J. Long : English Literature.

\*\* R. W. Church : The Growth of the English Novel.

*Shirley*, the third novel of Charlotte Bronte, is marked with a strong note of realism. To those who expected to find romance in this work Charlotte gave the warning—"Calm your expectations. Something real, cool and solid lies before you, something unromantic as Monday morning." The novel deals with the efforts of Robert Gerald Moore, a millowner to marry Shirley Keeldar, a young woman of wealth to tide over the financial crisis that faced him in his industry. He is being rejected by Shirley who senses his mercenary motives in marrying her. Shirley marries Louis, Younger brother of Robert. In the character of Shirley we find a full portrait of Emily Bronte, younger sister of Charlotte Bronte.

In *Shirley* Charlotte wrote a novel in the somewhat desultory style of reminiscences. "The writing never reaches the emotional power, never makes the intense impression found in *Jane Eyre*, and there are some missish dialogues and diatribes which are frankly tedious."\* It is dull in comparison to *Jane Eyre*.

*Villette* and *Emma* are the last fruits of Charlotte Bronte. In *Villette*, Charlotte Bronte repeats the experiences of an English girl Lucy Snowe in a school at Brussels. The matter had already been used by her in *The Professor*. Parts of this book seem protracted and laboured. It has the same feverish note that we first meet in *Jane Eyre* with a less artificial resolution of the plot. "As a work of art *Villette* is not altogether satisfactory. It bristles with glaring improbabilities, is unequal in conception and shows signs of inevitable emotional overstrain. Memories of Mrs. Radcliffe and the Terror School are looked at every turn and yet flashes of imaginative brilliance are revealed."\*\* *Emma* deals with the personal experiences of Charlotte Bronte and lacks the warmth and passion of *Jane Eyre*.

Having examined the main works of Charlotte Bronte let us now evaluate her contribution to the English novel.  
A novelist of inner life.

Charlotte Bronte broke a new ground in the history of 19th century fiction. Instead of concentrating her attention on

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\* Phyllis Bentley : *The Brontes*.

\*\* Diana Neill : *A Short History of the English Novel*.

manners and ways of social life as had been done by Jane Austen, she attempted to probe the inner recesses of the heart and the soul. She replaced the novel of manners by the novel of the spirit. "A literature of manners was to give place to a literature of the spirit in the novel of Charlotte Bronte."\* In her novels the soul was revealed in its full glory. The soul was at last awake to its own existence and its relation to a complex and perhaps inscrutable universe.

**A novelist of passion and intense life.**

Charlotte Bronte was essentially the novelist of passion and storm. In her works we come across deep intensity and powerful emotional onrush of thought and feelings. There is a quivering sensibility that stirs us. Charlotte was dissatisfied with Jane Austen's passionless life and commenting upon her works she once observed, "Jane Austen ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood." What she found lacking in Jane Austen was supplied by her in her own works. "What Charlotte Bronte is really concerned with in *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* is the one thing only, the depiction of the isolated, naked soul responding to the experience of life with a maximum of intensity. The pleasantness or otherwise of the revelation is immaterial: the nakedness is everything. This means that, different though her experience was from theirs, in the last analysis Charlotte Bronte belongs to the same tiny group of novelists as Dostovsky and Lawrence."\*\*

**Limited range of her novels.**

As regards the panorama of life unfolded in her novels, we have to observe that Charlotte Bronte does not provide a diversified view of life. In her novels the vision of life is restricted to the few experiences that she had of life at Brussels and Yorkshire. The same matter is repeated by her in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. There is a family likeness, in all the novels of Charlotte Bronte. "There is emphatically a recurring pattern in Charlotte's literary carpet. As regards their matter: Yorkshire

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\* E. A. Baker : The History of the English Novel.

\*\* Walter Allen : The English Novel.

and Brussels, the governess, the tutor and the school are often repeated, interwoven with the cleric and the millowner. A deeper unity is achieved by the consistent theme. There is always the conflict between high integrity and worldliness.”\*

#### **Plot construction.**

Charlotte Bronte does not have any cogency and coherence in her stories. Her plots are rambling and discursive. “They curve in and out, sometimes running, sometimes sauntering. She was altogether clever but knew nothing systematically. It is this logical faculty which makes *Wuthering Heights*, inspite of all defects, a more compact story than *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* or *Villette*.”\*\*

#### **Characterisation.**

In the field of characterisation, Charlotte Bronte is interested in the study of woman and man as *individuals*, and her characters are drawn with dexterity and skill revealing the inner recesses of her male and female characters. She presents a new conception of heroine which differs from the conventional attitude towards women. Her heroines, particularly *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, are vigorous and active, energetic and full of verve and zest for life. Among her male characters Rochester attracts us most.

#### **Her imaginative poetry and painting ability.**

The novels of Charlotte Bronte are rich in poetic touches and pictorial effects. Her descriptions of natural scenery reveal the hand of a poet and a painter. Scenes of tempest and storm flash through her novels. “A special manifestation of this power may be found in her descriptions in *Jane Eyre* of imaginary pictures, which show that she had the spirit, though not the technical skill of the greatest of painters.”†

#### **Lack of humour and over-seriousness.**

In the novels of Charlotte Bronte one finds the lack of humour and light hearted gaiety. She is always in earnest. “She has no lightness of touch. She cannot believe that there are occasions when a smile is more effective than a sermon and a zest more

\* Phyllis Bentley : *The Brontes*.

\* Miss Marjory Bald : *Women Writers of the 19.th Century*.

† Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era*.

crushing than a blow. This lack of humour affords a ground more grave than any other for doubting the permanence of her fame. With few exceptions they whom the world has chosen to remember have been gifted with it, but Milton is among the exceptions.”\*

#### **Coarseness in Charlotte's novels.**

It has been pointed out that Charlotte Bronte's novels are coarse, rough and brutal. But the charge is not justified. “She was unflinchingly sincere, and whatever of coarseness there may be in her works came from her photographic fidelity to the life she knew, and was no part of the fibre of her mind. Among the men and women of her acquaintance it was the custom to speak plainly and to call a spade a spade. The display of uncurbed passion was familiar to her, and hence she frequently depicted her characters as saying words and doing deeds which to some of her readers seemed unnecessarily coarse, brutal and cruel.”\*\*

#### **Lack of moral teaching.**

In Charlotte Bronte's novels there is little of preaching or moral teaching. In this respect she differs from George Eliot who was a moralist at heart. It is not possible to squeeze a moral out of her productions. “To teach” she said, “is not my vocation. What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. I cannot write a book for its moral.”

#### **Her style.**

Charlotte Bronte writes with the sensitivity of a poet. There is something exquisite and unique in her phrases. To appreciate her prose we have to read them together rather than in isolation from the context. “Her best phrases are not exquisite when segregated. To appreciate them we must light upon them in the midst of a printed page. To pull phrases is like pulling petals off a flower and exhibiting them as representatives of its beauty, while the charm has evaporated and even the very fragrance is diminished.”†

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\* Hugh Walker : The Literature of the Victorian Era.

\*\* Ibid.

† Miss Marjory Bald : Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century.

**Conclusion.**

"It is not as thinker or poet or social reformer that Charlotte Bronte should be judged. She is essentially a novelist and as a novelist she merits the warmest praise. The fire of life burns strongly in her works."\*

**Q. 66.** Give an estimate of Emily Bronte (1818-48) as a novelist and write a note on her '*Wuthering Heights*.'

**Ans.** Emily Bronte, the younger sister of Charlotte Bronte, was one of the prominent novelists of the nineteenth century. She has been able to carve out for herself a place in the history of English fiction by her one single novel *Wuthering Heights*.

Emily Bronte was in every way sharper and bleaker than her two sisters and she was of emotion all compact. She was a poetess as well as a novelist but it is by her one single novel rather than by a large number of her poems that she is known to the modern readers. As a novelist Emily is known by *Wuthering Heights*. It is a masterpiece of genius and has been the subject of "many ardent eulogies and appreciation almost poetic in their enthusiasm."\*\* It is an impersonal novel and stands in strong contrast to the extreme subjectivity of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. (It is a work of art and is marked with fury and fire, deep emotion, intense passion, strong hate and stormy feelings.) "It is a work of stark grandeur in which a wholly non-moral world of fierce symbolic action is localized quite precisely in the author's experience of Yorkshire life." (Emily presents in this novel a very powerful story of terror and revenge and the entire work is enlivened by flashes of lyrical passion and emotional exuberance. The novel fully justifies the opinion of Matthew Arnold that the author's soul.

*Knew no fellow for might,  
Passion, vehemence, grief,  
Daring, since Byron died.*

In the words of Richard Church this novel is "one of the most odd and unplaceable works in the whole of English fiction."

\* Phyllis Bentley : The Brontes,

Lionel Stevenson : The English Novel, a Panorama.

It remains a lonely peak in the landscape of the English novel."\* In the words of Moody-Lovett, "This novel has gradually come to be recognised as one of the major imaginative creations of the century."\*\*

The story is filtered through the minds of two onlookers and the stirring incidents are being presented through the mouth of Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean, the house-keeper of Wuthering Heights. The story deals with Heathcliff, Cathy, Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, Edgar Linton and it is a powerful tale of revenge. The story tells us how Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, owners of the farm house called Wuthering Heights, lived splendidly well with their two children, Hindley and Catherine. Another family of the Lintons lived at a distance of four miles from the Wuthering Heights. Mr. and Mrs. Linton had two children, Edgar and Isabella. One day Mr. Earnshaw went to Liverpool on a business trip and on his way back he brought with him a homeless boy whom he had picked up on the street. Earnshaw brought up this young brat and gave him the name of Heathcliff. This young boy began to grow in years and Catherine started loving him a little though her brother Hindley had no liking for Heathcliff. A few days after the arrival of Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights, Mr. Earnshaw died leaving the charge of his property to his son. Hindley, who degraded Heathcliff to the level of a servant behaved rudely with the unsupported boy. Hindley did not like the growing love between Catherine and Heathcliff and insisted that Catherine should marry Edgar Linton. Heathcliff was deeply mortified at this insult heaped upon him by Hindley and one day he quietly slipped away from the place only to return three years later in a much better financial condition than he had ever seen in his life. On his return to Wuthering Heights Heathcliff was welcomed by Hindley. Catherine, who had married Edgar Linton in the absence of Heathcliff once again revived her old love for Heathcliff. She was torn in a conflict and died in agony giving birth to a daughter named Cathy. The death of Catherine produced a feeling of deep resentment in the heart of Heathcliff and he decided to take full revenge on

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\* Richard Church : The Growth of the English Novel.

\*\* Moody-Lovett ; A History of English Literature.



Hindley who had stood in the way of his marriage with Catherine. Heathcliff succeeded in ruining Hindley by enticing him in gambling and drinking bouts. Hindley lost everything in gambling to Heathcliff including Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff became the master of Wuthering Heights. He ill-treated Hindley and his son and reduced them to the position of labourers. He eloped with Isabella Linton and hoped to acquire the entire property of Lintons through his son Linton Heathcliff, born as the result of Heathcliff's life with Isabella Linton. Heathcliff managed to acquire both the property of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. His plan of revenge was accomplished but he could not make all Lintons and Earnshaws wretched for Hindley's son Harton and Cathy continued to love each other for the rest of their lives. In the meantime Heathcliff died without seeing the complete destruction of the houses of Earnshaws and Lintons.

This novel is "unique for its dark and thunderous atmosphere and its powerful fusion and inordinately passionate love and hatred."\* Though it centres upon an overmastering love, it is devoid of sexual passion as well as moral judgments. (It only 'displays the tragic action with fatalistic impressiveness.\*\*)

The plot of the novel is a little confused "but the story abounds in excitement and suspense which are skilfully heightened by the peculiar and complex mode of narrative."†

The characters of *Wuthering Heights* are elemental beings and Heathcliff, Catherine and Edgar continue to hold us in their grip. Emily Brontë "portrays, with absolute fidelity the weakness of the Lintons, the appalling insensate hardness of Heathcliff, the egoism of Cathy and the fatal consequences of all these qualities, yet she views these characters as she does, the deer, the wolf and the hare; that is, with regret for their defects, but with understanding and compassion."

This novel exhibits the full play of cruelty in human life, "The action is laid in hell." says D.G. Rossetti, "only it seems that places and people have English names there," and hellish feeling

\* Moody-Lovett—A History of English Literature.

◆◆ Lionel Stevenson.—The English Novel a Panorama.

† Phyllis Bentley—The Brontës.

is created particularly at the behaviour of Heathcliff towards his victims. The reader feels stifled and choked. Throughout the book the capacity of brute force seems magnified beyond endurance. "Every beam of sunshine is poured down through thick bars of threatening cloud, every page is surcharged with moral electricity."\*

The deep emotional force of the entire novel shall be felt by every reader. (Emotions portrayed in the novel have a terrible force about them. They are "wild as the north wind, dark as the storm cloud and strong as the rock.")

The fire of poetry burns through the pages of this powerful work and the poetic touches emanating from the speeches of its characters are "felt in the blood and felt along the heart." The following lines spoken by Heathcliff provide just a simple survey of the rich poetry that runs throughout the novel. "I cannot look down the floor, but her features are shaped in the flags! In every cloud, in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught in every object by day—I am surrounded with her image. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist and that I have lost her."

*Wuthering Heights* is rich in vivid portraits of nature particularly of the Moorlands. As we read this novel we come across dark rocks, tumbling blocks and wild wind, wailing and raging over their heads. "The natural setting constantly colours the Moors, the Moors through the changing seasons being described with the poet's observation and a poet's sense of the inevitable word."\*\* "We feel ourselves alone with earth in one of her grand, wild and sombre manifestations."†

The novel has a philosophic, moral and symbolic value of its own. The end of Heathcliff exhibits the defeat of evil. Evil is always self-doomed. The tempestuous passions of the characters are thus tranquillised by being shown against the eternal background of nature's impersonal processes.

*Wuthering Heights* is not so much a symbolic or a philosophic novel as a novel of romanticism. *Wuthering Heights*,

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\* Charlotte's observations regarding 'Wuthering Heights'.

\*\* Lionel Stevenson—The English Novel, a Panorama.

Phyllis Bentley—The Brontës.

in short, is a belated masterpiece of romanticism. "Just as Jane Austen had been an anachronistic eighteenth-century rationalist in the romantic heyday, so Emily Bronte was an anachronistic romantic visionary amid Victorian practicality."\*

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**Q. 67. Give a brief account of the main works of Anne Bronte.**

**Ans.** Anne Bronte was the youngest of the Bronte sisters. Her main works are *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

*Agnes Grey* is another governess story, a *Jane Eyre* without its fire. It lacks both the melodramatic plot and the passionate assertiveness of Charlotte's novel. It has the familiar Bronte scorn of insincerity, the Bronte condemnation of selfish, vain, self-centred women, and the Bronte preoccupation with love. The heroine is a governess who falls in love but is inarticulate with shyness. The hero is a good hearted curate who understands the silent love of his beloved and rewards her for her unexhibited love. The novel ends happily. In place of Charlotte's vehemence we have a quiet tone in the novel and the tedium is relieved by touches of amiable humour.

The second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is an ambitious attempt and holds the same relationship to *Wuthering Heights* as her preceding one had to *Jane Eyre*. The novel is an interesting study of a drunkard who meets his tragic end because of his excessive addiction to drink. The portrait of the drunkard Arthur Huntingdon is admirably drawn. Huntingdon presents the portrait of Anne's brother who was actually killing himself with alcohol and drugs. Agonised by the moral dissipation and moral disintegration of her brother, Anne intended "her novel to be a terrible warning against sin and self-indulgence. The obvious moral purpose and the author's self-torture in writing the book produced an effect that is painful rather than tragic."\*\*

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\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama.*

\*\* Ibid.

**Q. 68.** What was the contribution made by the Bronte sisters to the English novel ?

**Ans.** The Bronte sisters—Charlotte, Emily, Anne—made notable contribution to the English novel during the nineteenth century. They represent the 'stormy sisterhood' in English fiction, and it was their effort to introduce the true spirit of romanticism and emotionalism in fiction

"The Gothic novelists had rebelled against the 'reasonable' limitations of the eighteenth century, but they got bogged on the terror tale and generally failed to go deep enough to make their revolt completely effective. The Brontes had what the Gothic people lacked : they worked against the background of that vast spiritual awakening which we call the Romantic movement. In the Brontes, the Romantic movement captured the English novel. Deserting the drawing room and the town they drove to the elemental things."\*

Instead of concentrating on the depiction of the manners and customs of social life as was done by Jane Austen, they turned their gaze to the inner spirit of their characters and presented in their work the study of souls in distress and suffering. They had the ruthless determination to dig down to the roots of the inner life. They were not interested in the portrayal of social life as in the laying bare of the human soul passing through all the trials and tribulations of a chequered life. They chose to study the feminine heart and presented the woman's point of view in their fiction. They presented a new conception of the heroine as a woman of vital strength and passionate feelings. Jane Eyre, Shirley, Agnes are fine studies of feminine life providing glimpses into the workings of their souls.

The Bronte sisters had limited experience of life, but their narrow and limited experience did not stand in the way of their achieving excellence in their work. Of course the repetition of the same matter made their novels somewhat stale, but the dullness was relieved by the presentation of passion and emotion in an intensified form. Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte had experience of being governess, school teachers and pupils, and they repeated the same scenes and experiences again and again in their

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\* Wagenknecht : The Cavalcade of the English Novel

novels. *Professor* is enjoyable but the repetition of the same theme in *Villette* makes the book uninteresting. But what saves the books from staleness is their emotional fervour and exuberance. They represent emotions and feelings in a picturesque and convincing manner, and that sways the readers.

From the point of plot construction, the Bronte sisters have not much to their credit. The plots of their novels are complex and often formless, and in many cases there are dishevelled and entangled episodes, but what they lose by way of story-telling, they gain by their characterization. Their characters are elemental figures. We can neither forget the male nor the female characters. Jane Eyre, Rochester, Shirley, Heathcliff, Catherine, Agnes impress us deeply. The characters are truthfully and sincerely portrayed in all their vices and brutalities.

The Bronte sisters introduced the subject of passionate love in their novels. They were novelists of passion, and often there were scenes of intense passionate life. Charlotte has been compared to George Sand in her presentation of passion in her novels. Romanticism in its passionate aspect, which Sir Walter Scott had missed in his novels, was introduced by the Bronte sisters. Emily used the matter of Gothic Romance to perfection and her *Wuthering Heights* is "a belated masterpiece of romanticism. Just as Jane Austen had been an anachronistic eighteenth century rationalist in the romantic heyday, so Emily Bronte was an anachronistic romantic visionary amid Victorian practicality."\*

Their novels are poetic and there are passages that almost border on poetry. In their prose passages there is a gleam of poetic fire. In *Wuthering Heights*, the reader will come across many beautiful poetic passages that will move him to ecstasy and joy.

The most obvious contribution of the Bronte sisters was the presentation of the life of Yorkshire and its rich spectacles of nature. "They all present its landscape—Charlotte realistically, Anne nostalgically, Emily fully, poetically and superbly. They all use its rich rough dialect. They all present its people—though they present them in different ways."\*\*

Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama.*

\*\* Phyllis Bentley—*The Brontes.*

**Q. 69.** Write a note on the main novels of George Eliot (1819–1880).

**Ans.** George Eliot was one of the prominent novelists of the nineteenth century. She belonged to the Victorian Age but was very much different from the early Victorian novelists. She was an intellectual writer and like Meredith was interested in the revelation of the inner life of her characters. Her preoccupation was mainly in delving deep into the souls of her characters from an intellectual point of view. She was extremely thoughtful, reflective, moral, ethical and philosophical and in her hands fiction remained no more an instrument of mere entertainment but became an agent of moral edification and psychological study of human motives and actions. "Again and again it has been pointed out that fiction in her hands is no longer a mere entertainment; it strikes a new note of seriousness and even of sternness; it has turned into a searching review of the gravest as well as the pleasanter aspects of human existence, reassuming the reflective and discussive rights and duties pertaining to the novel at its beginnings, without however sacrificing any of the creative and dramatic qualities that had developed in the intervening centuries."\*

Whatever came out from the pen of George Eliot was marked with an honesty of purpose and courageous determination. "She imparted to all that she wrote a fragrance of ardent sincerity which compensates for many failings of her aesthetic judgement."\*\* With these introductory remarks regarding the general nature of George Eliot's novels, let us now critically examine her works.

The works of George Eliot are conveniently divided into three groups corresponding to the three well marked periods of her life. In the first group are to be placed her early essays and miscellaneous works. In the second group we include *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, all published between 1858 to 1861. The novels of this period are based on the author's personal life and experiences. The scenes in these novels are laid in the country surroundings and

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\* E. A. Baker—A History of the English Novel.

\*\* Legouis & Cazamian—A History of English Literature,

the characters are drawn from the people of the midlands with whom George Eliot had close familiarity. "They are probably the author's most enduring works. They have a naturalness, a spontaneity; at times a flash of real humour, which are lacking in her latter novels and they show a rapid development of literary power which reaches a climax in *Silas Marner*."\* In the third group are included *Romola*, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. These novels are philosophical and political in character and appear to be the product of a laboured artistry. In them there is the wealth of reflection and analysis of character, but the peculiar charm of the country life and country character is missing from them. In them "there is very little of inspiration."

*Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) includes three stories (i) *Amos Barton*, (ii) *Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story*, (iii) *Jonet's Repentance*. These three stories appeared at short serials in Blackwood's Magazine during 1857. When they were published in two volumes as *Scenes of Clerical Life*, they caught attention. The author's identity was not revealed but when the publisher demanded a name it was given as 'George Eliot,' "In setting and characters the three stories were derived from Mary-Evans' childhood surroundings in Warwickshire. With quiet humour and pathos she depicted rises in the lives of ordinary people with normal weaknesses. Although superficially resembling the domestic fiction of the decade, the stories had deeper qualities of naturalness and insight. They were praised by several leading authors, and Dickens alone suspected that the writer was a woman. The increasing length of the stories showed her development towards the larger scope of the novel, and she soon felt hampered by the monotony imposed by her plan of centring each story upon a clergyman's family. By the time *Scenes of Clerical Life* was published she was at work upon a full length novel."\*\*

#### **Adam Bede.**

*Adam Bede* appeared in the same year as *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). In writing her first full length novel

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\* W. J. Long—English Literature.

• Lionel Stevenson—The English Novel, a Panorama.

she remained as faithful to the environment of her childhood days as she had been in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. The country atmosphere comes into its fullest play in this novel. The plot of this novel is based on a story told to George Eliot by her aunt Elizabeth Evans, a methodist preacher, and the original of the Dinah Morris of the novel, of a confession of a child murder made to her by a girl in prison when she had gone to her for the redemption of her soul. The story deals with Hetty Sorrel, a vain and selfish type of girl who starts flirting with Arthur Donnithorne, a young squire of wealth and fame, after discarding the sincere love of Adam Bede, a village carpenter. Arthur Donnithorne is a rake and after enjoying a few years of pleasure with Hetty he deserts her. Hetty, broken-hearted, consents to marry Adam Bede, but before the marriage is performed she gives birth to a child. She makes every possible attempt to find Donnithorne but fails in her search. In sheer desperation she kills her child. She is arrested and transported for the rest of her life. Adam Bede later on marries Dinah Morris, a deeply religious young Methodist preacher whose serene influence pervades the whole history.

In *Adam Bede* George Eliot provides many beautiful and interesting pictures of English countryside particularly of the Poyser's Farm. "The author's abiding love for the countryside and her photographic memory make the local colour authentic."

The characters of this novel are drawn with deep insight. Mrs. Poyser, Hetty, Adam Bede, Arthur Donnithorne are unforgettable figures. "Unlike any previous novelist, she was able to draw rustic characters humorously without a trace of condescension : the sententious Mrs. Poyser, in particular, partly based on the author's mother, is a noteworthy comic characterization."\*

This book is ethical in tone and directs our attention to the consequences that most inevitably follow a crime. The moral severity of the novel is well pronounced.

**The Mill on the Floss (1860).**

*The Mill on the Floss* is an autobiographical novel and is identified with her childhood. In writing this novel George Eliot dipped once more in the storehouse of memory. In this novel

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\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama.*



she presents her father, brother, aunt and mother with almost painful fidelity. It is a tragedy that moves us to the depth of our heart. Tom and Maggie are brother and sister. They are the children of the innocent but haughty and obstinate Mr. Tulliver, the miller of Dorlcote Mill on the Floss. Tom and Maggie have opposing qualities of character. Tom is prosaic, narrow-minded and hectoring in tone. Maggie representing George Eliot, is a girl of intense sensibility, having deep emotional feelings, and artistic tastes. A conflict ensues between the brother and the sister. Tom does not like Maggie's love for Phillip Wakem, the son of lawyer Wakem, who is supposed to be the evil angel of the family and mainly responsible for the ruin of the Tulliver family. Under the command of her brother, Maggie ceases to have all relations with Phillip. After the death of her father, Maggie leaves the mill and goes to visit her cousin Lucy Deane, who is going to be married to the cultivated and agreeable Stephen Guest. Stephen is attracted towards Maggie and the girl also responds to the call of Stephen Guest. When Tom knows all about this he is enraged and a further rupture ensues between the brother and the sister. In the meantime a flood descends upon the town. Maggie forgets all enmity and goes out to rescue her brother from the flood. They move out in a boat. The brother and the sister are reconciled at the end but unfortunately the boat goes down into the swirling water of the flood and they are drowned. In their death they are reconciled.

*The Mill on the Floss* is wanting in proportion and too much space is given to the girl and boy experiences. But this is natural and is explained by the tendency in every man and woman to linger over early memories. The background of the countryside exhibits the novelist's interest in nature and country surroundings. The characters of the novel, Tom and Maggie, are drawn with great skill and the character of Maggie is probably George Eliot's most profound study of the inner recesses of the human heart. At places the novel comes over the brink of poetry and it is this poetic freedom that makes the character of Maggie so magnetic and charming. The novel is not overburdened by ethical and moral homilies. It is more psychological than ethical in character

and the style is poetic and graphic at places.

There are certain defects in the novel and they have been pin-pointed by Lionel Stevenson in his panoramic survey of the English Novel in the following words : "*The Mill on the Floss*, then, is not merely a fervent investigation of love from a woman's point of view, but is also a truthful unveiling of the author's inmost feelings. Perhaps it is this extreme degree of personal involvement that prevents it from being one of her best novels. Unable to restrain her sympathy for Maggie, even when making exasperated comments on her faults, she did not maintain the impartial attitude that gives her other stories the particular power. This defect may have been brought home to her by several unfavourable reviews, which were probably influenced by the knowledge that George Eliot was the scandalous woman who was living with a married man. At any rate, her next novel scrupulously avoided personal elements."\*

**Silas Marner : The Weaver of Raveloe (1861)**—This is briefer than its two predecessors. It is a shorter novel, marked with moral earnestness and psychological insight. The ethical tone comes into prominence for the first time in this novel. The novel deals with the life of Silas Marner, a poor linen weaver, who accumulates gold and takes pleasure in enjoying the sight of his hoard. He is being robbed of his gold by Dunstan Cass, the Squire's reprobate son. Silas is deeply mortified at the loss of his hard earned gold, but this loss is made up by the incidental coming of a girl, Eppie, to his cottage whom he adopts as his daughter. Later on it is found out that Eppie is the daughter of Godfrey Cass and Nancy, Godfrey Cass being the good son of the squire. Eppie is claimed by her real parents but she refuses to leave Silas and lives with him. At the end Silas gets back the stolen gold, for the draining of a pond near his door reveals the body of Dunstan Cass who had stolen the gold. The story ends happily and Silas is rewarded for his patient endurance of the hardships that came in his life. "The entire story of *Silas Marner* is a rustic idyll in the Wordsworthian tradition, with roots deep in folk legends. The psychology, however, is as sound as in her other books, and there is mellow

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\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama.*

earthy humour in her sketches of unsophisticated types.”\* The novel is rich in excellent pictures of country life and is marked with flashes of humour which relieve its gloom. The characters of Silas, Dunstan Cass, Godfrey and Dolly Winthrop are very finely drawn.

#### **Romola (1863).**

*Romola* is a great work of George Eliot. In this novel she goes for her plot and characters to Florence of Italy during the Renaissance period when Savonarola was preaching his gospel to the people of his country. George Eliot leaves the familiar background of the midlands for capturing the exotic atmosphere of Italy. The novel deals with Romola, the daughter of an old blind scholar and her love for Tito, a Greek scholar, who ultimately proves to be a rogue and a scoundrel. Romola, being disappointed in love, turns for faith to Savonarola but here too her idealism is shattered when she finds Savonarola falling away from his lofty idealism and grovelling in the mire as many others did in those days.

*Romola* is remembered not for the Italian atmosphere and setting, which dissatisfied many people, who had actually been to Italy, but for the vision of inner life. It is a profound study of moral development in the character of Romola and of moral degeneration in Tito. “In a word, *Romola* is a great moral study and a very interesting book; but the characters are not Italian, and the novel as a whole lacks the reality which marks George Eliot’s English studies.”\*\*

*Romola* had undermined George Eliot’s health and made an old woman of her. For two years she did not write anything and when she resumed her work as a novelist, she turned back to English provincial life, though not to idyllic rural scenes, and produced three works: *Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch*, (1867) and *Daniel Deronda* (1871), which burn with a passionate conviction and contain some of her best character studies.

#### **Felix Holt.**

*Felix Holt* is a political novel dealing with the English political affairs at the time of the First Reform Bill. *Felix Holt*

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\* Ibid.

† W. J. Long—English Literature

is a noble minded young reformer who seeks to impress upon his fellow workers that their salvation would lie not in agitating through legislature but through education. In contrast to Felix Holt stands the figure of Harold Transome, who is neither lofty in idealism nor moral in his life as a lover. He loves Esther Lyon, who is disillusioned by his hypocritical ways and marries Felix Holt. The chief charm of *Felix Holt* according to Lionel Stevenson is, "in the love story wherein a frivolous girl is weaned away from her selfish pastimes by her affection for the idealistic radical."\*

#### **Daniel Deronda.**

It is a novel dealing with Daniel Deronda, a noble-hearted Jew. Daniel is devoted to the mission of spreading religion. He refuses to marry Harlegh, a beautiful woman, who being dissatisfied with the behaviour of her husband Grand Court, turns to Daniel for marriage. Daniel Deronda refuses to marry her and marries Mirah, a Jewish woman. He devotes himself to the noble task of popularising religion.

#### **Middlemarch.**

*Middlemarch* is a study of provincial life and the scene is laid in the provincial town of Middle March in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is a love story principally dealing with the affairs of Dorothea Brooke and Mr. Rosamund Vincy ending in despair. "In *Middlemarch*, the psychology tends more clearly towards an intuitive idea of mind and consciousness. Her most powerful novel even if it is not inspired or the most harmoniously constructed, is the last in which the activity of her courageous, evermoving mind has been expressed in terms of scenes and figures familiar to herself, and thus endowed with artistic reality."\*\*

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**Q. 70. Give your estimate of George Eliot as a novelist.**

**Ans.** George Eliot was one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian Age. Among the women novelists of her age she occupies a distinctive place and can easily be considered the

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Lionel Stevenson—The English Novel, a Panorama.

\* Legouis & Cazamian -A History of English Literature.

precursor of the psychological novel developed during our times. She was a novelist of intellectual life and like Meredith intellectualised the novel imparting to it a moral fervour and ethical bias which it had not yet possessed. In her hands the novel did not remain merely an instrument of entertainment but became an effective weapon of moral regeneration and ethical redemption. An air of sobriety and seriousness characterises her works and in spite of the humorous touches that are introduced here and there to enliven the rugged tone, she remains essentially a novelist with a mission. Her seriousness is something which cannot be cast aside. "It must be remembered that George Eliot was one of the Victorian "sages" as well as a novelist, one of those who worried and thought and argued about religion, ethics, history, character, with all the concern felt by those most receptive to the many currents of new ideas flowing in Victorian thought and most sensitive to their implications."\*

**Plot Construction**—George Eliot did not very much care for plot construction on the conventional Victorian lines. In the formation of her plots she was not governed by any standard formula. She had certain ideas to convey through the medium of her novels and she gave them the farthest logical development in her works. Hers are the "first novels 'which set out to give a picture of life wholly unmodified by those formulas of a good plot which the novel had taken over from comedy and romance. Her story is conditioned solely by the logical demands of situation or character, it ends sadly or happily, includes heroes or omits them, deals with the married or the unmarried, according as reason and observation lead her to think likely. In fact, the laws conditioning form of George Eliot's novels are the same laws that condition those of Henry James and Wells and Conrad and Arnold Bennett. Hers are the first examples in English of the novel in its mature form; in them it structurally comes of age."\*\*

**Her realism**—The novels of George Eliot realistically present the life of Midlands, Warwickshire and Derbyshire. The intimate touch of personal knowledge about the kind of life lived in these areas is felt by every reader who goes through them.

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David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature,

\*\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

Scene after scene, character after character, in these novels have been identified with places and persons with whom George Eliot had been familiar. In her latter novels, particularly *Romola* she cast aside the realism which had characterised her work in *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* but later on, at least once in the *Middlemarch*, she came back to her favourite theme of the countryside and its surroundings in Warwickshire and Derbyshire. In *Romola* she had presented Italian life which she had tried for the first time. However she could not achieve much success in the portrayal of a foreign land. Here she faltered and failed. It is only once again in *Middlemarch* that she could hold out a gleam of her former glory and her realistic portraiture of life.

**As a psychologist**—Meredith and George Eliot are psychological novelists of the Victorian Age and both of them tried to focuss the light not on the external trappings of personality but on the inner struggle in the souls of their characters. George Eliot sought to reveal and analyse the motives, impulses, and influences that worked in the formation of her characters. Analysis of the motives of her characters was her main forte. She brought to bear on the novel the searching imagination of a rationalist and philosophical thinker. The stamp of a highly skilled intellect, a probing mind and a searching analytic faculty can be felt on every page of her novel. She was a successful psychological novelist and to represent the inner history and inner life of her characters was her main preoccupation. "All happenings she showed, are but the meeting and intermingling of courses of events that have their source in the inner history of mankind.\*

**Her seriousness**—The great contribution of George Eliot to the novel was that she made it an object of seriousness, gravity, loftiness and solemnity. For her the novel was not a chief source of entertainment and relaxation. She made it an instrument for philosophic thinking and posed problems in her novels which only very serious thought of a high level could possibly solve. "Again and again it has been pointed out that fiction in her hand is no longer a mere entertainment, it strikes a new note of seriousness and even of sternness; it has turned into a searching review of the

\* W. J. Cross—Development of the English Novel,

gravest as well as the pleasanter aspects of human existence, reassuming the reflective and discursive rights and duties pertaining to the novel at its beginnings, without however sacrificing any of the creative and dramatic qualities that had in the intervening developed centuries.”\*

As a moralist—George Eliot was a moralist at the heart and the general tone and temper of her novels is that of moral earnestness and austere grimness. As a moralist George Eliot laid emphasis on the performance of one’s duty and leading a virtuous and righteous life. F. W. H. Myer’s conversation with George Eliot at Cambridge in 1873 shows what she thought of *duty* in life. “She stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet calls of men—the words *God, Immortality—Duty* pronounced, with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third*.” A slip in conduct in her view was likely to lead to serious consequences resulting in the deterioration of characters. Tito’s degeneration in *Romola*; Lydgate’s fall in *Middlemarch*, Gwendolen Harleth’s humiliation and recovery in *Daniel Deronda* were brought about by their lapses in moral conduct. She showed, through their discomfitures and decline, that disobedience to moral laws brought utter ruin to human life.

George Eliot believed that life is just. She was sure that “those who live virtuous life are essentially contented, that those who live a vicious life are essentially discontented. However well meaning you might be or however ‘lucky, she was sure that you cannot escape the consequences of your own actions; that your sins find you out, that the slightest slip will be visited on you, if not immediately then later.”†

Her Characters—George Eliot’s principal interest was in character portrayal, particularly the inner man. She was not so much interested in presenting external appearance and idiosyn-

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\* E A Baker - History of the English Novel

† David Cecil—Early Victorian Novelists,

crasies of her characters as in revealing their inner life. "We do not remember her serious characters by their appearance or the way they talk, indeed we do not remember these things clearly at all. Her portraits are primarily portraits of the inner man."\*

George Eliot's art in characterization lies in the fact that her characters evolve and grow as the novel proceeds ahead. They are not fixed. They continue to grow either for the worse or for the better. They go from weakness to strength or from strength to weakness. This is exhibited in the degradation that comes in the character of Tito in *Romola* and Lidget in *Middlemarch*. In the beginning these two characters are presented to be noble and good but gradually they decline and go down the slippery way of degradation and moral ruin.

The characters of George Eliot are governed by moral considerations. They have a leaning for the moral side. They are always true to themselves. They are consistent. "Through every change of fortune, every variety of circumstance, they remain the same clear recognizable individual moral entities."

George Eliot achieved success in portraying complex characters like Maggie Tulliver and Tito. "It is the habit of my imagination", said George Eliot, "to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself."

George Eliot's female characters are better drawn than her male characters and her male figures are made with a woman's attitude towards the male sex. Nearly always the subject is studied from the women's point of view, the women are so vastly superior to their lovers that it is difficult for the reader to appreciate all that it means for them.

George Eliot's characters have generally been identified with her relatives and friends. Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* is after the fashion of her aunt. Mrs. Poyser, Hetty's aunt, is said to show some traits of George Eliot's mother. Adam Bede was drawn from her father. The picture of Maggie Tulliver in *Mill on the Floss* is her own personal study. Her brother Tom is Isaac and her father is portrayed in the owner of the Mill.

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists



**George Eliot's humour**—Though George Eliot was essentially a novelist of the tragic life representing the shadows that cross human existence, yet to relieve the tedium of her novels she introduced comic characters marked with flashes of humour. The humour in her novels rises principally through her rustic characters like Mrs. Poyser. She could paint humorous characters who could provide mirth to her readers. Her humour became ironical and satirical in character. The Dodson sisters are a pleasant source of ironical humour and the same is true of Mrs. Glegg's frequent quarrels with Mr. Glegg.

George Eliot kept certain subjects away from the plain of humour. "She thought it shockingly heartless to make fun of people's tender feelings, or sacred aspirations. Even at its brightest her humour is not exuberant. But within its limitations it is both individual and delightful. Intelligence gives it edge; good humour gives it glow: it sparkles over the comedy of rustic provincial life, at once cool and mellow, incisive and genial."\*

**Her Pathos**—The pathos in the novels of George Eliot is touching. She is genuinely pathetic rather than sentimental in the presentation of her heart-rending tragedies. "George Eliot completed the work of Wordsworth. He dealt with the pathos of the pastoral life in a spirit of measureless humanity; she mingled its pathos with humour and produced the greatest dramatic effect."

**Her style**—George Eliot's style in her early novels is lucid and simple but later on it becomes reflective and abstract "Her style, through many a page, through whole chapters and episodes, has the indefinable quality that suggests a lesson in psychology, ethics or history."\*\*

**Q. 71.** Give a critical account of the main novels of George Meredith (1828-1909).

**Ans.** George Meredith was one of the greatest of the Victorian novelists. He was a psychological novelist interested in unfolding and unravelling the inner life of his characters and their

David Cecil—Early Victorian Novelists.

\*\* Legouis & Cazamian—History of English Literature.

motives. He could not be a popular novelist like Dickens nor was he a feast for pallets nursed on the savoury food of Dickens. He was a novelist for the intellectuals who could have the patience of threading through the intricacies of his thought evolution and crabbedness of his prose style. Only those who had been endowed with a suppleness of mind, a lively wit and a comic spirit could alone possibly enjoy the novels of this great doyen of fiction during the Victorian Age. "With Meredith the "new" novel is upon us with a vengeance-obliqueness, indirectness, elaborate psychological analysis, sustained intellectuality and all the rest of it."\*

The earliest work of Meredith was *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856). It is an oriental story and furnishes an elaborate imitation of the *Arabian Nights*. It is a burlesque oriental story and the author adopts the form and style of Beckford who produced *Vathek* in the eighteenth century. "In the love incidents and love scenes, in exuberance of imagery, in picturesque wildness of incident, in significant humour, in aphoristic wisdom, it was a new Arabian Night."\*\*

*Farina* (1857) followed *The Shaving of Shagpat*. It is a burlesque of German romance and embodies some interesting reminiscences of Meredith's education in Germany. It is modelled on the medieval folklore of the Rhineland.

Three years after *the Shaving of Shagpat* Meredith produced his first great novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. This novel represents the conflict between traditional authority of parents and the new upsurge of youth in revolt. Here the author brings out the conflict between Richard Feverel and his father Sir Austin Feverel, a wealthy baronet. Sir Austin brings up his son according to his own pattern of thought. When Richard comes of age he breaks away from his father's tyrannical hold and starts loving Lucy Desborough, a neighbouring farmer's niece. They secretly marry. When Sir Austin knows of this marriage he adopts a clever stratagem to break the marriage. He wins over his son to his side and sends him to London to redeem an erring beautiful woman with whom he falls in love. Later on Richard knows that

\* Wagenknecht : *Cavalcade of the English Novel*,

\*\* Hugh Walker *The Literature of the Victorian Era*

his former wife Lucy had given birth to a child and he had become a father. Lucy is reconciled to Sir Austin and the way to happiness is opened for Lucy and Richard but it is never consummated. Richard learns of the designs of Lord Mount Falcon on Lucy and challenges him to a duel. Richard is seriously wounded. The shock of the serious injury to Richard upsets Lucy and she dies of the shock. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is weak in plot construction and the conclusion is rather unbelievable. The scenes of nature and love between Lucy and Richard are presented exquisitely in a charming manner. The poetic touches in this novel make it beautiful. But most of the critics of the day were dissatisfied with the work. The unfavourable reception was based not so much upon its obscurity as upon its immorality. The treatment of sex does not shock modern readers but the Victorians could not possibly swallow it and the book was banned by Moodies' chain of circulating libraries which had the power to establish or destroy the reputation of a new novelist.

**Evan Harrington**, which followed in 1861, is an autobiographical novel and represents the attempt of a sister married to a Portuguese nobleman to launch her brother Evan Harrington on high life and make him look a nobleman. Evan Harrington is the son of a tailor. Evan's sister, Countess de Saldar, marries a Portuguese nobleman. She makes every possible effort to present her brother as a person of noble birth and make him look impressive in social life. The novel recounts the adventures of Evan Harrington in search of eminence.

**Rhoda Fleming** (1865) is an interesting study in feminine psychology. The main setting of this novel is a farming community and the central situation is close to that of *Adam Bede*. The author deals with the amorous adventures and intrigues of two sisters, Rhoda and Dahlia Fleming, daughters of Kentish Yeoman farmer. This novel is more realistic than George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. "It stands apart from the rest of Meredith's work not only in its rustic milieu but also in its relatively straightforward narration and unadorned style."\*

**Vittoria** (1870) is Meredith's nearest approach to a full-dress historical romance. Soon after this historical tale of romance,

came **The Adventures of Harry Richmond** which appeared anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1871. This novel is concerned with delusions of grandeur.

The three great novels of Meredith that deserve special attention are *Beauchamp's Career* (1875), *The Egoist* (1879) and *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). *Beauchamp's Career* is a political novel and it is very much different from the romantic fervour of *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*. The disillusioned asstringency of *Beauchamp's Career* seems cold blooded after the romance *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*. *Beauchamp's Career* is a political novel and its main theme is that of the English party—politics, shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century. Navil Beauchamp begins his career in navy where he shines out as a gallant officer. He gains the approval of his uncle Rombrey, a medieval baron. Navil enters into politics and falls under the influence of Dr. Sharpnel a radical-thinker. He does not succeed in his plan and is defeated in his political pursuits. Later on Navil falls in love with Cecilia Halkett, an English girl, but is unable to achieve success in love. He is defeated both in politics as well as in love. Happiness comes to him at a later stage but after a few month's happiness he meets his death while attempting to rescue a child from the sea. The tragic conclusion of the novel is arbitrarily imposed on this work and ends with an episode that seems to resemble Hardy's capitulation to blind chance. The concentration of the novelist is on the tragic obscurity of Beauchamp's inadequate power of judgment.

*The Egoist* (1879) is a 'comedy in narrative' of which the central figure is Sir Willoughby Patterne, a man of position and power, but extremely self-centred and conceited in his life. Sir Willoughby is loved by Lactitia, a poor and shy girl but the self-conceited man rejects her and loves Constantia Durham, who later on elopes with an officer of hussars. This flight of Constantia is the first humiliation that Sir Willoughby has to undergo in his life. Being disappointed, he draws towards Clara Middleton, the daughter of an epicurean professor, and wins her hand in a whirlwind courtship. He is jilted the second time and Clara proves a source of humiliation to the proud, conceited and self-centred man. Clara marries Vernon Whitford, and Willoughby,

in sheer despair, unites himself to Laetitia Dole.

This novel is formless and the plot is extremely complicated and jumbled: "Indeed, one can scarcely speak of plot at all, what we have instead is design, pattern. The pattern, as the hero's name suggests, of the Willow Pattern Plate. Sir Willoughby Patterne, that admirable Crichton, the hero of self-regard, having been jilted by Constantia Durham, jilts Laetitia Dole in order to marry Clara Middleton, is jilted by her in the end, stripped of his pretensions casts into abject nakedness; is compelled to marry Laetitia on her own terms. It is as simple as that."\*

"This book has a Moliere—like concentration upon the foibles of a central character, Sir Willoughby Patterne, a monster of self-concern. In portraying him, and settling him in his environment of a noble country-house and the English landscape, Meredith offers the reader, through every possible distortion of English syntax, a picture of life in which the Chiaroscurs, the dominant tone, is one of April sun and shower with all the flowers of Botticelli alight in a young green world."\*\* Meredith disapproves the egoism of Sir Willoughby's discomfiture.

"Sir Willoughby, in particular, is anatomized as no previous character in fiction had been. The author apparently despises him to the verge of loathing, and yet makes us realize that his contemptible behaviour springs from traits that are present in every man. Sir Willoughby is not a villain. In the eyes of most people—including himself—he is a paragon. His final humiliation, like that of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, awakens our pity more than our satisfaction."†

From the technical point of view *The Egoist* shows the fuller development of Meredith's individual manner. Every paragraph of this novel is enriched by the use of figurative language including symbols and metaphors that supply a unifying pattern.

The *Egoist* was better received than any of Meredith's previous books. Critics had now come round to the view that a

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\* Hugh Walker: *The Literature of the Victorian Era*.

• Walter Allen: *The English Novel*.

† Lionel Stevenson: *The English Novel, a panorama*.

good work of fiction ought to be characterised by intellectual vigour and subtleties. In Meredith's work they found the new heaven of intellect. Dissatisfied with the traditional products of popular novelists, they acclaimed *The Egoist* as their ideal.

**Diana of the Crossway** (1885) is a political novel, and its popularity can be judged from the fact that in three months three editions of the book were sold out. Here for once critical judgment and popular judgment were in accord and harmony. This novel has been recognised "as Meredith's strongest effort to forward the emancipation of Victorian womanhood, but from it the reader comes to the conclusion that a woman cannot stand alone and triumph."\*

The theme of this novel is based on the romantic story of the lovely and celebrated Mrs. Caroline Norton, Sheridan's grand daughter. This lady had been badly treated by her husband and she wrote pamphlets on behalf of woman. It was alleged that she had sold a cabinet secret (Peel's resolve to abolish the Corn Laws) to *The Times*. This lady formed the heroine of *Diana of the Crossways*, and everyone recognised in Diana, the figure of Mrs. Caroline Norton. Diana was the emancipated Victorian woman on whom the Victorians frowned with disfavour. "From a literary point of view *Diana* is inferior to *The Egoist*, although, like all Meredith's work it is instinct with beauty, wit and poetry."\*\*

In a trilogy of novel—*One of Our Conquerors*, *Lord Orment and his Aminta* and *The Amazing Marriage*—written towards the end of Meredith's literary career, he showed a knack in presenting the relationships between men and women when these were influenced by considerations of pride of birth; social position, and the question of legitimacy.

**Q. 72** Give your estimate of George Meredith as a Novelist.

**Ans.** George Meredith was the great intellectual and psychological novelist of the Victorian Age. "No writer of the nineteenth century stands more alone than he (Meredith), and none is more difficult to deal with. Browning himself is not more

\* Richard Church : *The Growth of the English Novel*

\*\* Hugh Walker : *The Literature of the Victorian Era*,

original. Here and there the reader may be reminded of Carlyl or of Thackeray or of Browning."

#### **Meredith's art of story telling and plot construction.**

As a story teller Meredith could not achieve that success which fell to the lot of Dickens and George Eliot. He was not a narrator and hardly pretended to tell a story. In the opinion of Oscar Wilde Meredith could do anything "except tell a story."

His plots are extremely confusing and complicated and it is really very difficult for a reader to thread through the intricacies of his plot construction.

Sometimes Meredith arbitrarily thrusts certain conclusions on his plots which will not be warranted by the sequence of events. In *Richard Feverel* and in *Beauchamp's Career* the tragic ending is arbitrarily imposed and many readers have felt dissatisfied with the way in which these two great novels have been concluded. J. B. Priestley's opinion regarding Meredith's story telling is worthy of our consideration. He says in his admirable study of Meredith in the *English Men of Letters Series*, "If we regard the novel as a tale, pure and simple, an arresting and convincing chronicle of events, Meredith must inevitably appear a colossal failure. From the point of view of narration, every novel that he wrote was not merely faulty but downright bad. The movement of the story is lame and awkward, the different parts are not well knitted; there are loose ends dangling everywhere. We find ourselves caught up in the vast glittering webs of his plots and know the exhilaration of unravelling them."

#### **As a psychological novelist.**

Meredith was a psychological novelist and his interest was not so much in the presentation of external realities of life such as Dickens and Thackeray had viewed : but in the revelation of the inner soul of his characters. He dealt with the invisible life and threw light on the inner problems and involutions of thought. In his novels all incidents are coloured by psychological touches and are described not as they would strike an observer, but from the point of view of the actor.

#### **Intellectual quality.**

Meredith's novels like that of George Eliot are marked with

note of intellectuality. "Like the chief poets of the times they (George Meredith and George Eliot) reflected far more than their popular predecessors the intellectual interests of England of their times."

#### **Meredith's opposition to sentimentalism.**

Being a novelist of the intellectual life Meredith was strongly opposed to any representation of sentimentalism in his novels. It is a standing charge against the novels of Dickens that he often sentimentalises, particularly in the presentation of pathos and death scenes. This charge cannot be levelled against the novels of Meredith. In his novels sentimentalism is subjected to the hammer blows of the comic spirit.

#### **The comic spirit and comedy in Meredith's novels.**

The novels of Meredith display the central working of the comic spirit. He tersely explains what he considers to be the essence of the comic spirit in the opening sentences of *The Egoist*.

The comic spirit is the weapon of intelligence and reason against stupidity and dullness. It is the voice of civilisation against barbarism. "It is the 'sword of commonsense', by which such evils as hypocrisy, conceit, egoism, and false pretensions to social eminence are crushed. It is essentially a satiric spirit—against tradition or prejudice, social stupidity or individual folly."

Meredith's novels work under the influence of the comic spirit and the novelist satirises folly, stupidity, egoism, sentimentality where these vices are found. Meredith's comic spirit is very closely akin to Ben Jonson's comedies and plays the same part as it does in the comedies of the great Elizabethan dramatist.

#### **Meredith's creed.**

Meredith's novels present an optimistic attitude towards life. The rosy picture of a glossy future is unfolded in his pages. Meredith feels confident in the hope of an improved human race in the future. He suggests that "individual life does not die, it lives on in the larger, richer life of the future which it helps to build up." Just as he sees hope for individual and for race in the process of evolution, so, too, Meredith trusts in growth and change to bring about social and political advance. More brain power, the



cultivation of reason and of intellect, the help of the comic spirit alone can bring the strength to get rid of undesirable conditions. He hates the materialism and meanness and faithlessness of modern life, above all, he hates the undue preponderance given to wealth, and the enervation and weakness to which it leads. Yet everywhere, amid prevalent evil, he recognizes signs of progress and ultimate good, he believes in the worth of human fellowship and the duty of service. Such service can be rendered only as a result of the knowledge that comes from a resolute facing of facts in nature and in human life.”\*

#### **Meredith's characters**

Meredith's characters, both male and female, are drawn from aristocratic and upper middle-class society. His characters are presented with a deep psychological insight and the novelist probes deep into the hearts of his men and women and successfully presents their psychological motives in undertaking a particular line of action. His characters are psychological and seldom speak as naturally as the characters of George Eliot do. “They are more like Browning's characters in packing a whole paragraph into a single sentence or an exclamation.”\*\*

“Meredith achieves eminent success in the portrayal of women and his heroines are better drawn than his heroes. As a delineator of women he stands alone among the nineteenth century novelists for the sheer poetic intensity with which he realized the infinite variety.”†

#### **Meredith's Style.**

Meredith's prose style in his novels is as difficult as that of Sterne, Carlyle and Browning. He is one of those novelists “who have whimsically misused English language.”†

He does not speak directly to the readers. He speaks through maxims and aphorisms. “Both in prose and in poetry Meredith is a difficult writer, and this is due only in part to the profundity of his thought. His wit and his consequent delight in the skilful play of language sometimes lead him astray ; he

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\* E. A. Baker : English Novel.

\*\* W. J. Long :- English Literature:

† Diana Neill : A Short History of the English Novel.

† Cross : Development of the English Novel.

is so anxious to *avoid the commonplace* that at times he falls into obscurity by what seems sheer wilfulness. Another reason for his occasional obscurity is his wilful and deliberate use of elliptical sentences. No writer is more *allusive in style* than Meredith. His language is naturally metaphorical and symbolical; he does not seek comparisons, they spring to his lips unsought. As a result he is seldom direct and simple in his appeal. Again, he has a great deal to say, and is able to express himself by many different methods which jostle each other for precedence, so that his language is apt to become burdened with the richness of an over-blowing imagination. His aim is to compress into a few words profound thought and memorable images.”\*

**Conclusion :**

Due to his enigmatic style and his psychology Meredith will never be popular, but by thoughtful men and women he will probably be ranked among our greatest writers of fiction. “He was no poseur. Even those who are most annoyed by his idiosyncrasies find his work persistently coming back to them, long after they had imagined they were done with him. He has vitality despite all his indiscretion ; a profound sincerity underlies his innumerable flourishes. In some inexplicable way, his pages seem curiously flooded with light.”\*\*

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**Q. 73. What are the main points of similarity and difference between George Eliot and George Meredith ?**

**Ans.** George Eliot and George Meredith were the prominent novelists of the Victorian age. They were psychological novelists interested in the study of inner life. They were equally interested in the problems of human conduct, and considered selfishness as the root cause of all our troubles. The following words of George Meredith in *Rhoda Fleming* seem to be like those of George Eliot.

“He closed, as it were a black volume, and opened a new and bright one. Young men easily fancy that they may

W. J Long : English Literature.

\* Wagenknecht : Cavalcade of the English Novel.

do this, and that when the black volume is shut the tide is stopped. Our deathlessness is in what we do, not in what we are."

The differences between George Eliot and George Meredith are even more striking than their resemblances. George Eliot worked through tragedy, Meredith through comedy. George Eliot's flair is always for the tragic side of life, George Meredith's for the comic. So completely was Meredith committed and engrossed to the comic standpoint that he saw the woeful story of Ferdinand Lassalle and Helena Von Donniges as the history of a pair of "tragic comedians." George Eliot's approach was ethical to the problems confronting her characters, Meredith's approach was that of a poet. "George Eliot identified religion so completely with the dogmas she discarded that having lost the dogmas, she never found religious certitude again. Meredith, on the other hand, worked out a philosophy of life which, whether he was right or wrong, completely satisfied his conscious needs. George Eliot, though she rearranged her material to suit her thesis, still attempted a realistic representation of life. Meredith's picture of life, on the other hand, can be called realistic only if God is a Meredithian."\*

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**Q. 74. Give a brief account of the main novels of Thomas Hardy (1840—1928).**

**Ans.** Thomas Hardy was one of the greatest novelists of the modern age, and though he has not been given a place among the ten great novelists by Somerset Maugham, yet his place is ensured among the greater masters of fiction in the Victorian and the Modern Age. Hardy was essentially a writer of tragedies and human life. His interest lay in the presentation of the grim and sombre scenes of human life and he became more solemn and serious than George Eliot could possibly be. He gave to the novel the dignity which had earlier belonged to the epic and to tragedy. "In spite of the loving exactitude with which he deals the characteristic features of Wessex life, he never lets us forget that this Wessex life is the part of the life of the whole human

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\* *Wagenknecht : Cavalcade of the English Novel.*

race and is inextricably connected with it.”\*

Hardy wrote a large number of novels and his works have been classified in a different way by different critics. Some have classified his works as tragedies or comedies or idylls, while others like Professor Lascelles Abercrombie have chosen to classify his novels as dramatic novels and epic novels. Those novels which have a single story and are free from secondary stories and plots and where one single person dominates the entire scene have been included under the heading of epic novels by Abercrombie. *Tess of the D'urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are included in the list of epic novels because the stories are concerned with the rise and fall in the destiny of a single person. In novels which have been classified as dramatic it is not man but a group of complex characters that interest us. In dramatic novels there is a clash of interests and this clash gives rise to a conflict which is the essence of a dramatic plot. In these novels there is a richness of dramatic episodes. The novelist is always in the background. Whereas in the epic novels the personality of the novelist obtrudes, in the form of moralisings, in dramatic novels it is generally kept apart. Judged from this standard, four novels of Hardy, namely *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are considered dramatic novels. Another method of classifying Hardy's novels can be as follows :

#### I. Novels of Character and Environment.

- 1 Under the Greenwood Tree (1872).
- 2 Far From the Madding Crowd (1874).
- 3 The Return of the Native (1878).
- 4 The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886).
- 5 The Woodlanders (1887).
- 6 Wessex Tales (1888)
- 7 Tess of the D'urbervilles (1891).
- 8 Life's Little Ironies and a Few Crusted Characters (1894).
- 10 Jude the Obscure (1895).

#### II. Romances and Fantasies.

- 1 A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873).

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\* David Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists.

- 2 The Trumpet Major (1880).
- 3 Two on a Tower (1882).
- 4 A Group of Noble Dames (1891)
- 5 The Well Beloved (1897).

### III. Novels of Ingenuity.

- (1) Desperate Remedies (1871).
- (2) The Hand of Ethelberta (1876).
- (3) A Laodicean (1881).

### IV. Mixed Novels.

- (1) A Charged Man, The Waiting Supper and other Tales.

Hardy wrote more than twenty novels but Douglas Brown mentions eight novels to represent Hardy's strength. "The novels I take to represent his strength are *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. To these five, *Under the Greenwood Tree* makes a fitting prelude, and *Jude the Obscure* (where Hardy ranges so much more ambitiously) an impressive epilogue. One other among the novels deserves particular respect, the modest but effective *The Trumpet Major*."

Having classified the main novels of Thomas Hardy let us examine the novels on which his fame is likely to hinge in the years to come.

#### **Under the Greenwood Tree (1872)**

This early novel of Hardy, originally called *The Mellstock Quire*, reads like a first draft for the fiction of Hardy's maturity. It has been considered a rural idyll. It is an idyll set in the country surroundings of Mellstock village. It describes the life of two young lovers Dick Dewy, son of the local 'tranter' and Fancy Day, the school mistress, who are happily married at the end. The novel is a picturesque study of country life and scenery and foreshadows Hardy's interest in the country surroundings.

#### **Far from the Madding Crowd (1873—74)**

In this novel Hardy deals with the life and country surroundings, far away from the madding crowd and ignoble strife of cities. It represents the love of Gabriel Oak, a selfless, devoted shepherd for Bathsheba Everdene, the capricious heroine for the showy Sergeant Troy of the town, whom she marries for his external polish and cultured manners. Bathsheba is disillusioned and

after the death of Sergeant Troy and Farmer Boldwood, another lover of Bathsheba, she marries Gabriel Oak. The novel ends on a note of triumph for the devoted Gabriel. The characters of this novel are finely drawn and the rural surroundings are in keeping with the general tone of the novel.

**The Return of the Native (1878).**

The scene in this novel is the sombre Egdon Heath, representative of the country near Warhem in Dorset. In this novel Nature enters more than any other novel of Hardy. It is indeed the story of Egdon Heath. Egdon is not only the scene of the tale, it dominates the plot and determines the characters. It is sentient, it feels, it speaks, it slays. The book opens with an impressive introduction to Egdon Heath which works as the main protagonist of the drama. The story of the novel is concerned with five important characters—Damon Wildeve, Thomasin Yeobright, Eustacia Vye, Clym and Diggory Venn. Damon Wildeve, an engineer, marries Thomasin Yeobright who rejects her humble adorer, the reddleman, Diggory Venn. Her cousin Clym, a diamond merchant in Paris comes back to Egdon with the intention of becoming a school-master in his native country. The title of the novel refers to the return of Clym Yeobright, the native to Egdon. He is disgusted with Paris life and that is perhaps the reason why he comes back to his native country. He falls in love with Eustacia and she marries him in the hope that she would be able to persuade Clym to go back to Paris and lead a romantic life with her. Much against Eustacia's will Clym settles down in the country surroundings and becomes a furze-cutter after the loss of his eye-sight. Eustacia feels dissatisfied with Clym and carries on her meetings with Wildeve, the engineer, with whom she ultimately elopes. Eustacia and Wildeve are drowned as they manage to escape through a stormy river. Clym considering himself responsible for the death of his mother and his wife becomes an itinerant preacher. Thomasin marries Diggory Venn.

**The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)**

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the study of Michael Henchard, a haytresser who sells his wife Sussan for five guineas to a sailor, Newson in a state of drunkenness at a country fair. Returning to

his senses he makes a frantic search for his wife and takes a solemn vow not to touch intoxicants for twenty years. Henchard starts working hard and by virtue of his energy and understanding of corn business, he becomes the Mayor of Casterbridge. After a few years troubles start in his life and his own manager Donald Farfrae proves to be the greatest stumbling block in the way of his life. Henchard's business is ruined partly because of his own audacity and hot temper and partly because of his faith in a soothsayer. He is being ruined in love and in business by Farfrae. Ultimately Henchard meets his death in very pitiable circumstance. The end of Michael Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge, brings tears to our eyes. In this novel Hardy's characterization is superb and the characters of Henchard, his step daughter Elizabeth Jane, Donald Farfrae and Lucetta have been very nicely drawn. This is the only of the Wessex novels in which the action occurs mainly in a town. The play of destiny in human life is brought out in its fullest form in the life of Michael Henchard. The novel is essentially a study of character, the character of Michael Henchard whose problem is "neither religious faith nor sexual relations but self-control."

#### **The Woodlanders (1887).**

*The Woodlanders* has been considered by Lionel Stevenson the best novel of Hardy. The scene in this novel is the wooded country of Dorset. The story deals with the life of Giles Winterbourne who is betrothed to Grace Melbury, the daughter of a timber merchant. The lady goes out to attend a fashionable school from where she comes out with changed colours. She refuses to marry Giles Winterbourne under the instructions of her ambitious father who seeks to bring the former engagement with Giles to an end on account of the financial misfortune that befell Giles at this time. Grace Melbury is attracted by a young doctor Fitzpiers, whom she consents to marry. Fitzpiers marries Melbury but soon deserts her and elopes with Mrs. Charmonds. After the death of Charmond, Grace and Fitzpiers are reconciled.

Parallel to the devotion of Giles to Grace is the devotion of Marty South, a simple country girl, to Giles Winterbourne. Winterbourne meets his death at the end. Marty and Grace

regularly visit his tomb. At the end of the book Marty alone remains the true remembrancer of Giles Winterbourne, for Melbury is ultimately united to her former husband. The charm of the novel lies in its country surroundings and the devotion of Marty South to Giles Winterbourne.

**Tess of the D'Urbervilles—A Pure Woman (1891).**

*Tess* is the study of a 'pure woman' who is the victim of an inflexible moral law and inexorable social code. Tess is the daughter of a poor foolish villager of Backmoor Vale. She thinks that she is the descendant of the ancient family of D'Urberville. Tess is seduced by Alec, a young man whose parents bear the surname of D'Urberville with doubtful right to it. Tess gives birth to a child as the result of her forced indulgence with Alec. The child dies in infancy. After sometimes Tess is attracted by Angel Clare, a clergyman's son. On their wedding night she confesses to her husband her former love affair with Alec. Angel is shocked at the narration of Tess's former love with Alec and abandons her. Misfortune and hardship dog Tess and she is once more driven to accept the protection of Alec. Angel Clare, after his return from Brazil, finds his wife in a difficult situation. He repents for his harshness towards his wife Tess. Tess feels uncomfortable under the charge of Alec and murders him to liberate herself from his hold. After a brief period of concealment with her husband Clare in the New Forest, Tess is arrested, tried and hanged. "Justice was done and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess. Tess pays her debt on the social court." It is Hardy's tragic masterpiece, and is his most ambitious tragic novel. "It is a great tragedy."

**Jude the Obscure (1895).**

*Jude the Obscure* is the story, in the author's own words, "of a deadly war waged with apostolic desperation between flesh and spirit." The novel concentrates on the aspirations of Jude Fawley, South-Wessex villager, for learning. Jude is not able to achieve success in his plans on account of his sensuous temperament, lack of character and the play of circumstances. Early in his life while he is still eager to acquire knowledge, he is lured by the charm of Arabella Donn, a 'mere female animal' and marries her. Jude, the stone mason, is deserted by Arabella. He once again



starts his studies in right earnest and the object that he keeps before him this time is to shine out as a priest. But again he is deflected from his course of learning and falls in love with his cousin Sue Bridehead, a vivacious, intelligent young school teacher. Jude is not able to express his love for Sue but he hovers about her in the hope of getting her at one stage or other of his life. She marries an elderly school master Phillston but finding him intolerable she breaks away from her husband and flies to Jude for shelter. They are married though in doing so they meet with social disapproval. Children are born to them but they all perish by a tragic fate. They are done because they were too many. Sue, in a state of agony and remorse returns to her former husband Phillston. Jude starts drinking and is once again enticed by Arabella Donn. He dies miserably. After this novel Hardy turned from Novel writing to poetry. In this novel Hardy "incensed conventional readers on less than three grounds. In addition to sexual irregularities and utterly hopeless determinism he included a note of social protest that had not been perceptible in his previous work in which poverty was taken for granted as an unavoidable fact of life."\*

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**Q. 75. Give your estimate of Thomas Hardy as a Novelist.**

**Ans.** Thomas Hardy was the last great novelist of the Victorian age, though his work, as a poet and a story writer, covers a few years of the twentieth century. He began his career as a novelist at the insistence of his wife Emma, who wanted to see her husband's name blazing in letters of gold in the galaxy of British novelists. Acting according to his wife's wishes, Hardy launched on the unexplored region of novel writing and achieved eminent success in his art. Posterity remembers him as a novelist though he himself wanted to descend into annals of literature as a poet.

Hardy's first experiment in novel writing was an utter failure, and his two early works *The Poor Man and Lady* and *Desperate Remedies* were condemned in severe terms by George

Meredith. He received instructions from the sagacious master in the technique of plot construction, and his later works were acclaimed as successful experiments in fiction writing.

#### **Hardy's Range.**

The range of Hardy's novels was fairly wide. He was interested in the presentation of conflict rising out of the impact between the country surroundings and the new urban civilization, reared on materialism and machinery. Hardy's preference for the old civilization of the countryside is well marked out in strong contrast to the conflict and dissensions of modern advanced civilization. Besides presenting the conflict between the old and new ways of thinking, Hardy's novels represent the problems of marriage and divorce in our society. His range covers social problems particularly the problems of marriage, unhappy wedlocks, divorces and love affairs. The helplessness of man under the impelling force of destiny is also brought out with all its grimness and the novelist feels a sense of frustration in presenting the unhappy lot of human beings swept away by the force of destiny and fate. His subject is not men but man. His theme is mankind's predicament in the universe. At every moment in the life of man a feeling of helplessness is presented bringing about despair and grief in the life of his characters. The range of Hardy's novels in spite of the wide canvas covered by the novelist is after all limited. "The theatre of Hardy's drama is built on a large scale, but it is sparsely furnished. His range does not allow him to present the vast, varied panorama of human life that we find in *War and Peace*. His scene is too narrow. The subtleties of intellectual life, the complexities of public life, the sophistications of social life-these do not kindle Hardy's imagination to work."\*

The truth is that Hardy's range excludes the presentation of the finer shades of civilised life or the diversity of the human scene as a whole. The life he portrays can be reduced to its basic elements. People in Hardy's books are born, work hard for their living, fall in love and die. They do not do anything else. Such a life limits in its turn the range of their emotions. We come across comedy, tragedy, and poetry in his novels, but they centre mostly round rustic life, and fail to take into account the life of urban

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\* Lord David Cecil : Thomas Hardy

areas, and the sophisticated society of modern times.

#### **As An Artist.**

"It would be claimed for the Wessex novels of Thomas Hardy" says Lascele Abercrombie, "that in them fiction has achieved both style and substance that enable it to fulfil the greatest functions of art." Hardy was a conscientious artist, and believed that the novel should be as much of a whole as a living organism, in which all component parts such as plot, dialogue, character, scenery, are fitly framed together, giving the impression of a harmonious building. He achieved eminent success in his mission of elevating fiction writing into a conscious art. There is the stamp of the architect, that Hardy was, in his artistic productions. His novels are masterly works of art.

#### **Hardy's Theme and Plot Construction.**

Great masters of English fiction have always realised the importance of plot in a novel, and have cultivated the art of plot construction in a remarkable way. Hardy was a lover of stories from the days of his childhood and as he advanced in years and became a literary artist, he realised more and more the importance of story telling in his novels. Hardy laid great stress on the plot or story of his novel, and reared the edifice in a skilful manner. He was an architect by profession, and left the impress of his professional proficiency on his novels. There is an architectonic quality in Hardy's plot construction. The plots are well-knit in spite of the presence of chance element and strange coincidences. They are complex for there are many incidents and details, but in spite of this complexity the compactness and unity of his plots is not lost. Nothing is forced and the incidents are bound together by a cause and effect relation—one incident arising out of a former and leading to a latter. In the words of Duffin, "Every novel is an answer to the question. Given certain characters in certain situations, and allowing for the irony of fate what will happen—what will become of them." In this marshalling of events to an ulterior purpose Hardy exhibits his skill as an architect and a master artist in plot construction.

Hardy's plots are not simple. In the words of Cazamian, "They grow out of elementary passions, ambition, greed, love, jealousy and the thirst for knowledge and the springs which move

them are psychological. Hardy tends to shift the construction of his novels to the inner world : he writes a moral drama, shows a conflict of contradictory wills guided themselves by feelings."

Hardy's plots are generally based on the following themes. He presents stories of love, involving the love-affairs of the principal characters. Jude, Tess, Eustacia Vye, Bathsheba, Everdene, Troy, Oak, Grace Mulberry have their love affairs. Some of the characters achieve success in their love affairs while others meet with despair. Hardy presents in his novels the trials and tribulations that come in the way of lovers.

Hardy presents in his plots the conflict between the old rural civilization and the new urban civilization. Tragedy in his novels rises from the influence of modern competitive civilization on the primitive and simple life of the old world. The primitive beliefs and manners of the old world people receive a rude shock from the impact of the strange disease of modern life with its sick hurry and divided aims, and misery follows in the wake of such a conflict. The plot of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* is based on this conflict between the old and the new world, between characters, belonging to the countryside, and characters coming to rural life from urban centres. Hardy's preference in his novels is for the countryside and rural surroundings. His novels bemoan the loss of rustic simplicity and innocence of country life under the impact of urban civilization.

#### **Hardy's Characters.**

Hardy's creative power is best exhibited in the portrayal of characters. His range in characterisation is limited, and he could draw only people belonging to the Wessex region. Hardy for the first time in English literature has chosen peasant types for his heroes and heroines in a series of literary masterpieces. The Wessex people are his ideals and when he leaves them, he does like Dickens at his own peril. He has given us convincing pictures of Wessex peasants, labourers, shepherds and singers. His Wessex characters seem to be like elemental forces on a background of vaster elemental forces. They are the logical and natural expression of sleepy woodland places, gaunt

austere hills, purling streams, and solitary extensive landscapes. When he attempts to portray characters from the higher aristocratic life of the urban areas, he fails, and his aristocratic characters like Lady Charmond and Lady Lucetta are not at all convincing.

Hardy's characters are emotional rather than intellectual. He did not adopt the psychological method of character portrayal which had been popularised by George Eliot and George Meredith. He laid greater emphasis on the emotional side of his characters than on their intellectual side. Bathsheba and Tess, Henchard and Oak are emotional characters, and they leave an indelible impression on our minds.

Hardy being a poet and a delineator of emotional characters achieved eminent success in the portrayal of lovers impelled by passion and emotion. He has presented men and women in love. Some of his characters, like Troy and Boldwood, Wildev and Angel Clare are passionate lovers exhibiting the fervour of their hearts in passionate speeches, while a good many of his characters are quiet and reticent in matters of love like Elizabeth Jane, Marty South, and Fanny Robbin.

It is one of the peculiar features of Hardy's characterisation that he presents good people with great admiration and gusto, and condemns villains and sophisticated persons with a sneering contempt. Hardy's sympathy is always with good, noble, and gentlehearted characters like Tess, Elizabeth Jane, Gabriel Oak, and Venn, The Reddlemen. He has a distinct dislike for shifty, cunning, and hypocritical characters like Sergeant Troy, Dr. Fitzpiers, and Wildev. He is seldom successful in drawing odious people.

Hardy's characters are generally flat and belong to certain types. His characters can be placed under certain groups, and persons belonging to one group have a family likeness about them. Hardy's concern is with men in general, rather than with individual man or woman. Classification and grouping is easily possible in Hardy's characters. In one group we place characters who are noble, selfless, self-sacrificing, tender-hearted and uncomp-laining. To this group belong Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterborne, John Loveday, Diggory Venn, Marty South, Elizabeth

Jane, Tess. In another group we have characters who are dashing, sparkling, vivacious, cunning, shifty, and fickle minded. To this group belong such characters as Troy, Wildeve, Dr. Fitzpiers, Alec D'urbervilles, Eustacie Vye, Mrs. Charmond, Lucetta, Lady Constantine. To these basic types is added a group of characters who are intellectual snobs like Angel and Knight.

It is to be observed that the good, noble and gentle characters of Hardy belong to the country surroundings. In his conviction the rural and the countryside has the capacity of producing noble, gentle, and good hearted souls. City life, with all its sophistications, has a baneful effect on human character and is likely to produce shifty, cunning and hypocritical characters. This preference of Hardy for his rustic and country-bred characters is well marked out in his novel.

Hardy has given a rich picture of human character in his novels. He has drawn men as well as women with remarkable skill. It is necessary to make a few observations about Hardy's men and women characters.

Hardy's male characters are vivid, passionate, emotional and impulsive. They usually suffer from indecision. They are sometimes the victims of passion and sometimes of stern determination. They sometimes exhibit valour and vitality, and on other occasions effeminacy and moral depravity. Hardy's male characters are real human beings, men of flesh and blood, and in their portrayal he brings the disinterested objectivity of a detached observer of life. He pictures all classes of male characters. We have selfless, noble, gentle, kindhearted and serviceable men like Gabirel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne; bold, shifty, cunning and hypocritical characters like Troy, Wildeve, Fitzpiers and Alec. There are men like Henchard who are brave and heroic, and persons like Boldwood who are passionate and stormy.

Hardy's skill is best exhibited in the presentation of female characters. He is another John Ford in this direction. "Profound as is his comprehension of human nature at large" says Duffin, "it is in the female personality that he is most marvellously learned." He has unfolded feminine characters

with all their subtlety, emotionalism, and passionate ardour in his novels.

Duffin has classified Hardy's women characters in three groups. The first group includes full-length portraits of women who are of a higher order of personality e. g. Tess, Sue, Eustacia, Bathsheba and Elizabeth Jane. The second group also consists of full-length study of women, but they have less personal significance e. g. Ethelberta, Elfride, Grace, Mulberry, Viviette, Anne. The third group includes women of much less significance e. g., Lucetta, Arabella, Tamsie, Marty South, Paula, Fancy Picotel.

It is to be noted that Hardy's preference is for women who belong to the country side. The finest qualities of women are developed and cultivated in rural surroundings. City women are sophisticated, cunning, and hypocritical. Tess, Elizabeth Jane, and Marty South are noble and gentle because they have been reared in the rural surroundings far away from the sick hurry and divided aims of modern life. Eustacia Vye, Grace Mulberry, Lucetta have been spoilt by their contact with the artificial and sophisticated life of the cities.

There is a category among Hardy's characters which may be called 'chorus' characters, the groups of rustics which in his greatest works form, as it were, the chorus of the main drama. They always appear in a group and never separately. They make observations about life and the activities of his characters. They are moralists at heart and carping in their criticism.

#### **Hardy's attitude towards Life-His Pessimism and Philosophy.**

Hardy was primarily an artist, and as an artist, it was his ambition to present his impressions of life in a detached and objective manner. He did not favour the idea of being called a philosopher, though philosophic ideas are found scattered in all his novels. He did not follow any preconceived pattern of philosophy that could be related to any particular school of thought. He was happy if he was called an artist and an impressionist, recording his impressions of life in his novels. Hardy, in fact, considered a novel as a work of impressionism rather than philosophy. In the preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* he says, "A novel is an impression, not an argument. A tale teller writes

down how the things of the world strike him without any intentions whatever." Hardy's novels are impressions that the novelist gathered from life.

Several influences worked effectively in the formation of Hardy's impressions about life. Hardy's ill-health, the morbidity of his temper, and his general inclination towards the funeral side of things determined his melancholy and pessimistic outlook and impressions about life. Added to these personal peculiarities of his temperament, were the external factors of his age and the times in which he lived. The rapid advance of industrial life destroying the serenity of country surroundings, and the general acceptance of the Darwinian *Theory of Evolution* striking a smashing blow at old religious convictions, coloured Hardy's thoughts and considerably modified his way of looking at life and its problems. Such thoughts as the following began to flash through Hardy's mind—"If, as seemed possible, it (world) was only a mechanical process evolving from no one knew whither, what was the significance of those moral and spiritual values which he had learned to regard as the most precious things in life ? If Christianity was not true, what became of the conception of Divine Justice bringing all to good in the end."

Considerably impressed by the above stated influences in his mental outlook, Hardy approached life and its varied visions. He cast aside the romantic and the roseate view of life. He viewed life in a realistic manner. He did not look at life through the many coloured glass of romance or of fancy, but in the spirit of a detached observer, accepting without any dismay what life really unfolded to him. It is this realistic approach to life that we find in Hardy's novels.

Hardy's vision of life is certainly not very attractive and glamorous. He did not find success, jollity, hopefulness, and ruddy optimism among the people whom he witnessed, and with whom his lot was cast. He came across despair, dejection, failure, frustration in human life. He noticed plenty of tragedy in the life of Wessex people who were poor, dependent, and ignorant. He found them exposed to the oppressions of the social system, the caprice of weather and "The President of the Immortals" every now and then undoing their lives. This is what



Hardy saw, and this is what is actually presented in his novels.

His attitude towards life is pessimistic and gloomy in the sense that almost in all his tragic novels like, *Tess Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Return of the Native* we come across pictures of despair and dejection, of hopes unfulfilled, and plans uncarried out. Man proves feeble before chance, fate or destiny that so often comes to vitiate man's plans and schemes. Hardy considers men and women as mere puppets in the hands of a mocking fate which is relentless in its blind justice. He believes in Omar Khayyam's lines about destiny ;

*The Moving Finger writes ; and having writ  
Moves on ; nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.*

Again and again in Hardy's novels we view the spectacle of misery and suffering for human beings. Man proposes and God disposes stands true in all his works. The tragedy of human life is enacted in all its grimness, for somehow or other, destiny, fate, divinity stands completely opposed to man's noble plans and schemes. Hardy sees the working of a malignant power and an immanent will pitted against frail human beings spilling disaster and distress in their lives. He feels that some vast Imbecility mighty to build and blind and impotent to tend has framed us in jest and is playing a cruel game with man's life. Everywhere in his novels human beings appear to be crushed by this power which is indifferent, callous and hostile to man. He considers that gods are opposed to human beings, and it is their pleasure that men and women should suffer, and meet with hard knocks and blows in life. He upholds the Greek view of life according to which the gods are cruel and heartless and kill men for their sport. Hardy presents with firm conviction the working of a sinister intelligence in the affairs of human beings, and reiterates with a firm force what Shakespeare had stated—

*As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods  
They kill us for their sport.*

Hardy fails to see any justification in Browning's observations about God and the goodness of human life. In *Tess*

Hardy controverts Browning's earlier statement about God and his wise dispensation of the Universe, and makes one of his characters remark—

*God's not in the Heaven*

*All's wrong with the world.*

The picture of life in Hardy's novels is thus gloomy and pessimistic. He does not find happiness in human life and in the concluding part of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, he makes the pregnant observation through the mouth of Ellizabeth Jane that, "Happiness is an interlude in a general drama of pain." Happiness in human life is an oasis which is easily submerged by the swirling waves of agonies, sorrows and sufferings. Through the wide canvas of his works we notice the shadows of darkness and sombreness pervading the entire scenes of his novels. There is suffering every where in the world and the virtuous as well as the vicious share it—

*To each his suffering : all are men*

*Condemned alike to groan*

*The tender for another's pain*

*The unfeeling for his own.*

Striking the keynote of Hardy's general impression and attitude towards life, Duffin nicely remarks—"Take it as you will, accept or reject, like or dislike—his opinion, a hundred times expressed and everywhere implied, is that life is a lost, inglorious and bloody battle, a wide deep sea of misery with but a very few flowering islands, a gift so powerful that it were almost a wise man's part to refuse it altogether."\*

To him life does not hold out any charm and he knows what life has in store for human beings. In his poem *To Life* Hardy makes his vision of life very clear. He says—

*O, Life with the sad sacred face*

*I weary, of seeing thee.*

*I know what thou wouldst tell*

*Of Death, Time, Destiny—*

*I have known it long, and know, too well.*

*What it all means for me.*

Hardy's attitude towards life is undoubtedly pessimistic

and gloomy. He holds out no hope for human beings. But his pessimism is not depressing, for he exhorts them to struggle and fight against the decrees of fate and cruel destiny, rather than make a weak kneed surrender to the majesty of the sinister and malignant power governing the universe. Hardy is of the view that it is man's lot to suffer and meet with defeat and dejection in his life, but inspite of this inevitable fate, man should strive and struggle and fight against untoward circumstances that may come in his life. He should go down fighting in a brave and heroic spirit. This attitude towards life is being presented by Hardy through the character of Henchard in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*, where the Mayor struggles and fights against the decrees of fate throughout his life though he ultimately meets his tragic end.

Hardy is not for intellectual cowards and invalids. His pessimism will be depressing to those who are morally and intellectually incapable of standing shocks in life. Hardy is not complacent in his attitude. He does not supinely give way to the cheap optimistic feeling that 'some how good will be the final goal of ill.' He is a sturdy realist who takes life at its face value, and what actually is the state of affairs in the world. He considers it simply wish fulfilment to indulge in cheap optimism, when the forces of evil, sadness and despair overpower us on all sides. It is foolish and unwise for anybody to be an optimist when he sees the conditions of life in a realistic and faithful light. Such is the realistic vision of life unfolded by Hardy in his novels. He is a pessimist, but his pessimism is more satisfying than the cheap optimism of some thinkers who hesitate to call a spade a spade, and gloss over the realities of life by a thin veneer of superficial optimism. Hardy's philosophy and sturdy realism will enable human beings to drive away day-dreaming and come to the realities of a hard and stern world. Hardy brings home to us to view life realistically as it is without expecting too much from the world, its controller and his created beings.

Hardy always impresses upon his readers that it is merely folly to seek happiness at the hands of Destiny or Providence. Man must depend on himself and learn to face the vicissitude

of fortune in a brave and heroic manner. "Abandoned by God, treated with scorn by Nature, man lies helplessly at the mercy of those purblind doomsters,—accident, chance and time from which he has had to endure injury and insult from the cradle to the grave."\* Let him face his destiny bravely.

Though Hardy arraigns and accuses God of imbecility and malignancy, yet he is not harsh and bitter against human beings. He is not a cynic like Swift nor a castigator of man like Webster. He has infinite sympathy for human beings crushed under the wheels of an overpowering fate. Hardy exhorts his readers to be sympathetic to the victims of social injustice and inequality and pleads feelingly for those who have to suffer the blows of fate and society in a rapacious manner. He impresses on his readers not to indulge in condemnation of their fellowmen even when they are weak and yield to temptation of the world. His philosophy is thus based on a sympathetic and catholic attitude towards life and is surely one of the finest fruits of literary culture in modern times."

Hardy, himself, did not like to be dubbed as a pessimist, but a meliorist. Hardy seems to have winced at the suggestion of pessimism in his thought. He has answered the charge of pessimism in the following words:

"People call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that 'not to have been born is best,' then I do not reject the designation. I never could understand why the word 'pessimism' should be such a red rag to many worthy people; and I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere. I do not see that we are likely to improve the world by asseverating, however loudly, that black as white, or at least that black is but a necessary contrast and foil, without which white would be white no longer. That is mere juggling with a metaphor. But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs, and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist." Hardy expresses his own theory about pessimism in these words: "As to pessi-

mism, my motto is ; first correctly diagnose the complaint—in this case, the human ills—and ascertain the cause : then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimists is : Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms. My view is to find a remedy for the ills if one can easily do so.” These words of Hardy’s sound satisfying and heartening. If things are what they are, why should we not face them without any illusion ?

### **Hardy’s treatment of Nature.**

Nature has always exercised a fascinating influence on the minds of poets right from the time of Chaucer to our own days. The Romantic Revival in England produced a number of nature worshippers, the chief of them being Wordsworth, who applauded Nature’s holy plans and considered her a gentle and kind mother. He took nature as his guide, nurse and sheet anchor of life. There is not a word of criticism against nature in Wordsworth.

Hardy’s attitude towards nature is quite the opposite of Wordsworth. Hardy does not regard nature as a kind and generous mother. For Hardy nature is the agent of cruelty and destruction. She has no sympathy for human beings. For him all the resourcefulness, all the beauty, all the charms, all the bewitching powers of Nature are for the destruction of man. Hardy thinks that Nature is insensible to the feelings of man, and finds a sort of fiendish delight in slaying simple human beings. Egdon Heath is the terrible spot where many lives are crushed. The virginity of Tess is ravished by Alec in the very lap of nature and not a word of protest is heard against the act by nature. Hardy complaining asks—

“Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of the chase. About them stole the hopping rabbits and hare. But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel ? Where was the providence of her simple faith ?”

Lord David Cecil makes Hardy’s attitude towards nature quite clear in his admirable study of Hardy. He says—“However, Hardy’s attitude to Nature was not Wordsworthian. He did not believe that Nature has any holy plan or healing power. Being

influenced by the theory of Evolution, he found much in Nature that was cruel and antagonistic to man.

Nature has been used in several capacities by Hardy in his novels. The influence of nature on humanity has been presented in different ways in his novels. Nature influences the moods and actions of Hardy's human characters. To understand the self-sacrificing love of Marty South, we must realize the spell of the brooding woods, the magic of the quiet, enduring trees whose life she knew so well. The strange, unearthly feeling of early morning to Clare in proximity to Tess; the tense, boring atmosphere while Gabriel Oak works to save Bathsheba's ricks from burning—these and many other scenes show natural aspects working on the mood of the persons and through them on the mood of the readers. The influence of nature on human beings is best illustrated in *The woodlanders*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native*

In most of his Nature scenes, Hardy presents an *emotional connection* between nature and human beings. Sometimes nature is affected by human emotions, and sometimes man is affected by nature's feelings. In *Tess* we notice a change in nature's feelings in accordance with the emotional change in Tess's life. With the progressive wreck of Tess's happiness there is also a symbolic change in the climates and atmospheres of the places where she goes, from the secluded vale of Blackmoor to the silent vale of the Great Dairies, the bleak chalk table-land of Fintcombe-Ash, fashionable sandybowre and at last the Great Plain and the Druid temple of Stonehenge. In the *Return of the Native*, Egdon Heath influences the emotions and feelings of the characters. The Heath imparts a tragic gloom to the characters of the novel. The Heath is employed to create the feelings of terror among the characters of the novel. In fact, nature enters too much in the moods and emotions of human beings in Hardy's novels. Lord David Cecil very nicely puts this inter-relation of man and nature in Hardy's novels in the following words—"Nature, first of all, played a larger part in Hardy's books than in those of any other English novelist. It is not just the background in his drama, but a leading

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\* Lord David Cecil: Thomas Hardy

character in it. Sometimes, it exercises an active influence on the course of events; more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mood and shaping the disposition of human beings. The huge black darkness of Egdon Heath dominates the lives of the character in *The Return of the Native* infusing into them its grandeur and its melancholy. His most living characters, moreover, are always natures of the country side. Farmers and shepherds, thatchers and hedgers, they most of them, never stray beyond its borders."

Whatever may be the relation between man and nature in Hardy's novels, it cannot be denied that the pictures of nature drawn by the novelist in his novels are graphic, vivid, and exhibit intense love for the external beauties of nature. Hardy has left innumerable descriptions of birds, grass, flowers, gardens, bridges, sunset, in his novels. He has perception both for the finer shades as well as the solemn harmonies of nature. His acute sense of observation and keen reception of the sounds of nature can be felt in all his novels. His landscapes and pictures of nature, both in its inanimate and animate aspects, exhibit the dexterous hand of a skilled artist and a meticulous painter. He combines the method of general broad line painting with the art of minute and accurate painting in his novels. "He has lovingly described the elementary, and grand aspects of Nature; the land which appeals to him most is that which is freest from human dwellings. He loves to paint the wood, where the seasons go through the infinitely varied circle of rich pastures, the sober hills of his native district; the bare uplands where the furrow of a Roman road runs straight and empty to the horizon; the gloomy vastness of the moor in which every living vanishes as if swallowed up in the depths of the centuries whose image is called by its immobility."

#### **Hardy's Humour.**

Hardy was a writer of tragedies and from such a writer we cannot expect pleasant and genial humour like that of Goldsmith. He cannot tickle us to broad laughter like Dickens. He cannot be placed in the category of great humorists like Dickens and Thackeray. The humour that runs through his work is of a grim

and ghastly kind. There is a note of bitterness in Hardy's novels. "Occupying less space but more characteristic, are his flashes of satiric humour, sometimes grim and occasionally ghastly. Here and there is a delicate, evanescent smile. His humour has not the society grace, nor often the artistic point of finish of Meredith; but it always rings true, and is never gross, coarse or vulgar"\*

Mostly humour in Hardy's novels rises from his rustic characters. They create humour out of their ignorance. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, there is pleasant humour when the driver of coach says that, "If there could be a George IV, there should also be a Charles IV. for Charleses are as common as Georges." Rustic humour also rises when Creedle and Cawtree indulge in mirthful talks in *The Woodlanders*. The remarks of Mother Cuxom and Solomon Longways on the 'cannibal deal' of Christopher Conney in the *Mayor of Casterbridge* are particularly humorous. "We are made to laugh at the immemorial butts of village life—garrulous, reminiscent old grand fathers, henpecked husbands, ludicrous, timid simpletons, and the incongruity between the facts of life and the countryman's ignorant comment on them."\*\*

The bitterness and satiric force of Hardy's humour can be seen in his death scenes and funerals. There is a grim humour in the remark that Sue's children in *Jude the Obscure* died "because they were too many." The death of Jude Fawley and Michael Henchard are instinct with ghastly and bitter kind of humour and irony.

#### Hardy's view of death.

Hardy does not believe in life after death. He finds no evidence of a conscious state after death. He does not hold out a land of bliss to the virtuous dead. All that virtuous people should expect is to live in the memory of some persons after their exit from the world. Dead persons can continue to live in the fragrant memory of those who are in some way related to the dead. No one should fear death for it marks the end of all miseries and sufferings in the world:

*Of comfort no man speak*

*Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs*

\* Duffin: Thomas Hardy.

\*\* Lord David Cecil: Thomas Hardy.



*Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes  
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.*

### **Hardy's attitude towards marriage and love.**

Hardy deals with the problems of marriage and love in two of his novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. The problem of marriage is set out with great force. In Hardy's view love at first sight does not very much help in making life happy. Marriages that are the result of love at first sight generally end in unhappiness. Marriages should be performed after matured consideration. The two people should study and understand each other before they rush into marriage. It is only by thoughtful consideration that marriages ought to be cemented. However, when married life becomes irksome or unhappy for anyone of the partners, each one must have the right to divorce the other. Man or woman must have the right to free himself or herself from his or her partnership in case it is impossible to carry on well in the married state of life. In the *Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy puts his viewpoint in the conversation that takes place between Susan and Henchard. "The conversation took a high turn, as it often does on such occasions. The ruin of good men by bad wives, and more particularly, the frustrating of many a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies, by an early imprudent marriage was the theme."

In one of his famous prefances Hardy writes, "A marriage should be dissolved as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties, being essentially no marriage." Hardy insisted on breaking the bond of marriage if it fails to make the couple happy.

### **Hardy's style.**

"Hardy's style is essentially of the philosophic type, an immanence of his mind.....And his style is grey—grey as November skies on Odysseus' sullen seas. The Hardy atmosphere is chiefly due to his style : it breathes in every paragraph and it is as recognisable and characteristic as the scent of the salt ocean.... Hardy's style thus satisfies the first demand that all styles are called upon to fill—it perfectly corresponds with and expresses the profoundest intention of the writer. It is not conspicuously beautiful, it is not luxurious or alluringly harmonious, it is in the main a bare significant narrative style of easy but not obtrusive balance. His

style is the mirror of his profoundest self.”\* ‘He is always great when some great occasion is presented.’ Like Shakespeare, he can vary his style with the variation of his themes.

**Hardy, a modern novelist.**

As a novelist Hardy belongs to that group of realists who would eliminate every trace of freedom whereby an individual becomes responsible for his acts. As a novelist typical of modern times Hardy loves the complexity of things, clash of principles and motives and the encounter of temperaments. The issues he deals with are great but not clear. There is a sense of entanglement. Right and wrong, courage and cowardice, duty and desire, are presented to us in confused conflicts. “It is no mere transcript of life at a certain time and place that Hardy has given us. It is a vision of the world and of man’s lot as they revealed themselves to a powerful imagination, a profound and poetic genius, a gentle and humane soul”.\*\*

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\* H. C. Duffin—Thomas Hardy.

\*\* Virginia Woolf : The Novels of Thomas Hardy.

## **20th Century Literature**

**Q. 76. Give a brief account of the social, political, economic and literary tendencies of the twentieth century, the age of interrogation.**

**Ans.** The Victorian era came to a close in 1900. The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new values in the field of social, political, economic and literary life. Compton-Rickett has pointed out three prominent features of the new age. (1) "Its reiteration of the old Revolutionary formula of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in a new setting (2) Its worship of Power rather than Beauty—here it parts company abruptly with the age of the Romantic Revival and the Victorian age. (3) Its challenging attitude of the elder values in Art and Life—this to some extent is true also of the age preceding, but the challenging attitude is more persistent, more searching to-day."\*

Besides these three prominent tendencies in our times, we find the literature and life of the modern age governed more by realism than by romance. The present age is essentially the age of realism and the modern writers, instead of dealing with the times of king Arthur and the Middle ages, have concentrated their attention on the problems of modern life. The realism of the modern age has further been accentuated by the growing upsurge of scientific discoveries. The new inventions and discoveries have brought a transformation in the old romantic values of life and have given a materialistic twist to whatever is considered sacred and valuable in life. This rapid growth of science and materialism and deification of machine has brought about a commercialisation of art, literature and music and the modern age is rightly branded as the commercial age of the world. In the world of today religion and spiritualism are on the wane and everywhere materialism is in the ascendancy. Many poets and novelists have felt disgusted with the growing cult of materialism, and their works

are marked with a note of revolt against this advancing tide of the modern times. Butler and Huxley are the prominent writers of the modern age, who have attacked in their works the modern craze for materialism and machinery. These great authors have exposed the weaknesses of the system based on the worship of machinery.

The age of machinery has brought about not only a feeling of revolt among the writers of our times but has also created a feeling of pessimism and frustration in them. Gissing felt awfully disgusted with modern industrial life and his novels are an attack upon the industrialism of the age. Being disgusted with the humdrum existence of modern life many authors have chosen to retire to the countryside where they seek to find refuge from the rattle and bustle of modern cities. In modern literature there is a growing attack on the dirtiness, seediness and squalor of cities. The seediness of modern life has found expression in the novels of James Joyce and Graham Greene. John Masefield has given expression to the dirtiness of modern trade and commerce in his famous poem *Cargoes*. He contrasts the beauty and romance of the past with the dirtiness and squalor of modern life in the last stanza of the poem.

The growing tide of materialism has brought about the disintegration of family relationship and authority. Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh* expressed the revolt of youth against the authority of parents. D. H. Lawrence has also raised his voice against the old Victorian authority and has pleaded for the freedom of the individual. Sex life is no longer eschewed, but finds vigorous treatment in his works.

During the twentieth century there has been a rapid progress of education. Educational facilities are available to all classes of people. Literacy has gone up and with it has come the greater love for the study of books. The rapid progress of education has brought about enormous output of books. In our times books are published endlessly and many inferior writers have started making money by their prolific pen. The sacrifice of art to business is a sorry spectacle of modern life.

In modern times literature has been employed for social purposes, particularly for reforming the festering sores and

'maladies' of contemporary society. Modern literature is characterized by propaganda, and through this medium dramatists have discussed social problems. "More than ever before would be reformers pinned their faith on the printed word and on the serious theatre as media for social propaganda, and the problem or discussion play and the novel of social purpose may be described as two of the typical products of the period."\*

In modern literature the novel has become the dominant literary form and it is through the medium of this important instrument of literature that social problems have been very nicely dealt. "In addition, the novel is admirably suited as a vehicle for the sociological studies which attracted most of the great artists of the period. The modern novelist is not only interested in social problems but is also equally well inclined to discuss psychological problems of the modern age." "He is no longer content with his old magic faculty of entering into their consciousness; he now enters into unconsciousness; the better to express the irrationality and disconnectedness of their mental processes, he may abandon syntax altogether and merely jot down disjointed phrases, unrelated words or inarticulate grunts to express their sensations."\*\*

In modern literature drama has once again witnessed a remarkable revival after an age-old slumber and obscurity to which it had fallen after the eighteenth century. In the hands of Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, Barker, T. S. Eliot, drama has made rapid progress in the twentieth century.

The pre-war years were the years of the novel and the drama and there was a relative eclipse of poetry. Modern poetry is not so significant and rich as modern novel and drama. A. C. Ward characterises modern poetry as puerile. Poetry was revived after an early period of stagnation by Yeats and a few other poets of the age. "The demand, long before expressed by Yeats, for a new and living poetical tradition was met between the wars in his own work and in that of the new poets—T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis Macniece. Poetry again became a vital literary form in close touch with life, and if it did not oust the

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\* E. Albert . history of English Literature.

\*\* Ibid.

novel from its primacy, it certainly outstripped the drama.”\*

New experiments were tried in all branches of literature. The traditional forms were thrown out and in their place new literary experiments were made in the field of poetry, drama and novel. “It is doubtful whether any period of English literature saw experiments so bold and various as those of the inter-war years. A natural corollary for the quest for new values and for a new vital tradition was the desire for new forms and methods of presentation and all the major literary genres of the age produced revolutionary developments.”

Twentieth century English literature has considerably been influenced by foreign artists in the field of drama, poetry, and fiction. The influence of Ibsen on modern drama has been profound in the sphere of form, matter and stage-craft. The influence of Romain Rolland, Dostoievsky and Flaubert is clearly perceptible in the modern novel. The philosophical theories of Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud have coloured the fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Charles Morgan.

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# Twentieth Century Novel

**Q. 77. What are the tendencies in modern English Novel ?**

**Ans.** The modern age is essentially the age of the novel. Hugh Walpole regards the twentieth century as an age of great novels rather than novelists. In his opinion, "It has been a period, however, of novels rather than novelists." No doubt there are great novels of perennial interest in our times which can be favourably compared with the novels of the earlier ages, but the novelists who have penned them cannot in any way be ignored. The modern age has produced great novelists like Henry James, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and great novels like *The Way of All Flesh*, *Old Wives' Tale*, *Forsyte Saga*, *Tono Bungay*, *Lord Jim*, *The Razor's Edge*, *Point Counter Point*, *A Passage to India*, *Analysis*, *Pilgrimage*, *To the Lighthouse* etc. Though the novel had made phenomenal progress during the Victorian age, yet it could not achieve that excellence which it has attained in the hands of the aforesaid novelists. The novel has gained an ascendancy over other art forms in the modern age, and from a technical point of view, the progress of the last sixty years is unequalled in all its previous history. One gets the feeling after reading a few novels of the modern age that the field covered by modern novelists is vast and variegated, and the currents and cross-currents sweeping through modern fiction are so forceful and powerful that one is likely to be swept of his feet and lost in the swirling flow of the stream. The modern novel has travelled on diverse paths leading to different directions, and some pointing to no destination at all. We are confronted by different schools of fiction, different types of novels, different techniques of plot construction and characterisation, and different angles of approaching the problems of modern life. Referring to the multitudinous changes in the subject matter, form, technique, and style in twentieth century fiction J. B. Priestley says, "If we are asked what

has been happening to the English novel during this period, we are tempted to reply, "Everything, and to let it go at that."

Before we examine the various tendencies and trends in twentieth century fiction it would be desirable to have an idea of the great novelists and the periods to which they belong. The earlier years of the twentieth century witnessed the flowering of a few great novelists like Henry James, Samuel Butler, George Gissing, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells. Since the greater part of their work was done during the reign of Edward VII, they are technically known as the Edwardians. After that we have the Georgian period extending over twenty five years, and during this period we have several prominent novelists such as J. B. Priestley, Frank Swinnerton, Hugh Walpole, Somerset Maugham, Charles Morgan, Compton Mackenzie, R. H. Mottram, J. C. Powys. They are all Georgian novelists. Then came a succession of novelists who looked with eyes of disfavour on the growth of the novel under the leadership of the Edwardians and the Georgians. Among these are Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf. They all developed psychological trends and satirical exposure of early Edwardian materialism. From 1939—1966, came a new set of novelists with different outlook and approach on life. Graham Greene, Henry Green, F. L. Green, Joyce Cary, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen are the prominent among post-war novelists. "Where, however, all these post-war novelists fail to live up to the standards by the great writers of the past" says Gilbert Phelps in *The Novel Today*, "is not in their subject matter, but in their lack of artistic detachment and control. They are too emotionally committed to the negative values they seek to illustrate : their attitudes are ambivalent and in consequence their characters and situations are not fully realized."

The twentieth century novelists have laid great stress on the art form of the novel. They have shown great consciousness of form. The modern novelist has rejected the irrelevancies of the Victorians, their moralisings, and direct appeal to the 'dear reader' of the story. Modern novels are not loose and rambling like the novels of Dickens and Thackeray, but have a compactness



of their own. The modern novel has, "few frills, few redundancies it is more like a well-cut garden than an opulent tropical jungle which the novel undoubtedly was in the hands of Dickens and Thackeray."

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the novel was mainly confined to the discussion of problems confronting us in social life. The Edwardian novel was essentially a *novel of ideas* including in its scope a free discussion of all kinds of ideas scientific, social, political, industrial and so forth. The Edwardian novelists considered it to be a sin to escape into a world of romance and psychology when the gaping wounds of social life were clamouring for reform and healthy treatment. H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett particularly concentrated their attention to the social problems of their times and made the novel an instrument of social propaganda. In their hands novel became purposive in character. It had a definite social purpose and aimed at the solution of social problems, domestic problems, and problems rising out of the stress and storm of economic life. H. G. Wells gave a fervent expression to the social character of the Edwardian novel in the following words—"A novel is in essence a discursive thing, a waxen tapestry of multifarious interest sufficiently elastic in form to take the whole of life within its compass—business, finance, and politics, till it becomes a proper medium for canvassing all social and political problems as they are." The concentration of these novelists was mainly on the problems of middle and upper middle classes, for many of them had sprung from the middle class life.

H. G. Wells discussed the problems of modern education in *Joan and Peter* and *The History of Mr. Polly* and exposed the educational imposture of the present day society. He advocated social reform in the field of education. Wells attacked modern commercial practices and fraudulent advertisement in *Tono Bungo* and sympathetically presented the problems of the servant employed in business house in *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly*. Galsworthy pointed his attention to the conflict between materialism, philistinism and cultural values in *Forsyte Saga*, and advocated a reorientation of our look for the proper appreciation of the values of life.

One result of this preoccupation with the problems of life was to give to Edwardian fiction the colour and touch of *Realism*, which the Victorians under the influence of Dickens and Thackeray had so very well employed in their works. H. G. Wells realistically presented the sorrows and sufferings of draper's assistants in *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*. George Moore, the Irish novelist, made a realistic study of the poorer classes in our society in his *A Modern Lover*, *A Mummer's Wife*, *Spring Days* and *Esther Waters*. In the last novel he presented a close and realistic study of the lower and more sordid sides of life with great sympathy for the underdogs of society. George Gissing focussed his attention on the life of the poor people, and realistically presented their woes and sufferings in a pathetic vein in *Thysa*, *The Nether World*, *Grub Street* and the *Private Papers of Henry Ryecraft*. Arnold Bennett realistically portrayed the life of the Five Towns in *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger*. He cast aside the trappings of romance, and concentrated all his attention to the presentation of the grim, ugly, and sordid life of the industrial districts. He succeeded in realistically portraying the society, the streets, the houses of the Five Towns by heaping minute details to produce a cumulative effect. In *Riceyman Steps* he concentrated on the sordid life of a miser, Henry Earlfoward, a bookseller, lost in the craze of money making. In the *Imperial Palace*, he presented all the details of hotel life. John Galsworthy in the *Forsyte Saga* presented Victorian materialism and lust for property. He brought out realistically the full picture of Victorian life led by an upper middle class society in all its bearings. As the social historian of the passing away of Victorianism, Galsworthy was without a serious rival. He brought out *realistically* their code of honour, snobbishness and distrust of passion. *Forsyte Saga* is a complete picture of the upper middle class society soaked in the wine of materialism and money.

Against this tendency of realism and materialism perceptible in the early years of the twentieth century with an accent on the discussion of social problems, stands the tendency for criticism of material values, and a love for romance and adventure. The note of disillusionment against modern realism in fiction and too much

engrossment with material values of life was sounded by the psychological novelists of the age such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, and by a few critics of modern life like Samuel Butler, Aldous Huxley, and E. M. Forster. In their novels we notice the tendency of scoffing at material values and realistic portraiture of the sordidness of life. Samuel Butler satirised the realism of modern civilization and its insistence on machinery in *Erewhon* the title of which is an anagram for nowhere. Aldous Huxley exposes post war disillusionment and immorality in *Yellow Crome*. The London society is exposed in all its ugly and wasteful futility in this novel and *Those Barren Leaves*. E. M. Forster is a severe critic of this materialism, and his *Howards End* is a bitter attack on the business mind and the worship of business in industrialised England. Forster attacks the Wilcoxes, thorough going materialists and upholds Schlegels upholders of moral and aesthetic values in life. Virginia Woolf severely criticised the Edwardian realism and wrote with characteristic frankness, "It is because they are spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul."

The reaction against the realistic trend of Edwardian fiction was further perceptible in the work of the romancers, who popularised another trend in fiction, namely, a love for romance, adventure, and the exotic lands. Among these writer who popularised romance, the most significant were Conrad, Kipling, Haggard, Weyman and Maurice Hewlett. Conrad's novels struck a new note in English fiction. He presented scenes of tropical jungles and sea-life in his *The Nigger of Narcissus*. *The Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Rescue and Rover*. His sea tales are thrilling and suffused in the aroma of romantic adventure, and struggle with the forces of nature. His actualities became clothed with romantic glamour and adventurous exaltation. Conrad emphasised the principle of fidelity in human relations, and laid greater stress on moral values than material values. Betrayal of trust and deception of one's fellowmen seemed to him to be heinous sins, and all his sea-tales particularly *Under Western Eye* and *Lord Jim*, illustrate

the philosophic strength of his moral convictions. "Indeed, far from writing in any materialistic spirit" says Gerald Bullet, "Conrad wrote with the vision and spirit of a poet. He wrote of the conflict between man and nature, and of the mysterious of the human soul, and, in his view of man the word "soul" was an inevitable word to use."

James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937) turned from realism to romance, and closely followed in the footsteps of R. L. Stevenson, the prince of romancers. Kipling was a different kind of romancer. Whereas Scott and Stevenson invoked the past and wove dreams of romantic fantasy, Kipling found romance in the present realities of life. "Kipling" says W. L. Cross, "is the romancer of the present, of the modern social order, on which shines from afar a light as resplendent as that which shone on medieval society, for it is the same light of the imagination. Kipling feels the presence of romance in shot and shell as well as bows and arrows, in the loves of Mulvaney and Dinab as in Ivanhoe and Rowena, in the huge python as in the fire-breathing dragon." His *Jungle Books* are replete with the romance of the forest, and his *Soldiers Three* with the romance of the barracks.

During the Georgian period, a new tendency began to be perceptible in English fiction, and it centred round the glorification of sex and primal human emotions and passions. The Victorian novelists and poets had frowned on the naked dance of sex in their works and exalted married love over illegal flirtation. The Victorian prudery about sex-morality was given a jolt by the Georgian novelists, and several prominent novelists got busy with the presentation of sex-relationship in their novels. In this respect the works of D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham and James Joyce are worthy of special consideration. These novelists treat of the physical side of sex in a blunt, matter-of fact manner without attempting to hide the naked facts like the Victorian-prudes.

Among the novelists who popularised the convention of sex in the modern novel stands D. H. Lawrence who clearly stated his faith in *Sons and Lovers*, in the following words—"My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. All I want to answer to my blood, direct,

without tribbling intervention of mind or moral or what-not. I conceive of man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle, forever upright and yet flowing." In his *The White Peacock*, *The Rainbow*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he concentrated on the subject of sex and wrote boldly in the preface of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—"I want men and women to be able to think sex fully, completely, honestly, and clearly." Lawrence's work is saturated in sex even when it happens to be devoid of sexual incident. Aldous Huxley, in his novels, concentrates on the portrayal of sex life. In *Point Counter Point* Huxley is wholly preoccupied with sex. His happy characters are those who like Lucy Tantamount are frank sensualists and care not a fig for mental and spiritual values. Joyce's works have been stigmatised as pornographic because of their preoccupation with sex life.

Twentieth century novel in the later part of the Georgian period began to come under the influence of psychologists, and as the years advanced, the psychological tendency became more pronounced in English fiction. A new technique was developed in the psychological fiction, and the new trend found its best exposition in the stream of consciousness, which was cultivated in all its complexity by William James, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In the new technique of the stream of consciousness, extreme emphasis is laid on subjectivism, and the passive states on the mind. Transitions are sudden, and progression is hampered. Past is mixed up with the present, and retrospect intrudes upon prospect. Present memories are inextricably combined and mixed up with past memories in an incoherent manner. Strict chronological development of the story is marred by rapid transitions, and an electric notation copes with time's swift spinning. In one respect, the stream of consciousness novel bears a close similarity to Imagist poetry. Words are employed by novelists of this school not in accordance with the rules and conventions of grammar, but in a peculiar manner of their own using them in their original picturesque or imagistic sense. In their endeavour to dramatize all shades of consciousness, they allow thought and emotion to shape and formulate words which do full justice to them. There is thus lack of coherence and harmony and sometimes one is baffled by

the jargon of words.

The stream of consciousness novelists follow the expressionist technique of presenting the characters, not by reporting their actions and sayings as observed by a recorder, "but by making the characters themselves reveal their inmost thoughts, moods and feelings, however inconsequent, fragmentary, and fleeting these may be," There is nothing fixed and steady. Everything is in a flux, moving as if in the flow of a stream, with the result that there is a 'mad chaos' in this stream of consciousness of fiction.

J. W. Beach in the *Twentieth Century Novel* makes the position about this stream of consciousness fiction very clear in the following words—"The stream-of-consciousness technique is almost invariably applied to persons of an extremely 'introverted type' to neurotics and those of unbalanced mind, or to occasional states of mind of normal individuals bordering on obsession or delirium : states of mind in which the consciousness is given over to the chaotic play of sensations and associations, undirected by the normal will to rational conduct."

The novels of Dorothy Richardson present the first experiment in the stream of consciousness fiction and psychological novel in the modern age. She presents the experiences of Miriam Henderson in *Printed Roofs* and her story is continued in a series of sequels, collectively called *The Pilgrimage*. The Pilgrimage books mark an epoch in the technical development of the novelist's art. Dorothy Richardson presents the moments of Miriam's consciousness fleeting from one shade of consciousness to another without any stoppage anywhere. It is Miriam's stream of consciousness going on and on. In this process we come across moments tense with vibration, moments drawn out fine almost to a snapping point. James Joyce in his *Ulysses* presents another psychological novel in the stream of consciousness technique. In this novel he presents the experiences of Leopold Bloom in Dublin extending over a day and covering eighteen episodes unconnected with each other. There are fleeting glimpses of the realities of life as seen by his characters and these stray reflections hardly cohere into the framework of a cogent plot.

The basic technique employed in presenting the thoughts

and reflections of Bloom and his wife is that of *internal monologue*. "The reader is inside Bloom's mind, in the flow of his inconsecutive and partially formulated thoughts and transient elings. Bloom's psychological process is one of expansion and contraction. An encounter, a memory, an association of ideas start his mind into extra-activity, which having reached a climax, ebbs away."

From the point of view of story telling James Joyce has proved extremely irritating and unpleasant. He also evolved a new kind of language in which normal syntax was abandoned and the sentence was no longer the basic unit of expression. "He discarded the traditional method of composition and employed a language in which words were torn from their customary associations, coined afresh and sent chasing helter skelter after the elusive shreds of meaning." Virginia Woolf achieved distinction in this type of fiction. For her the true and enduring reality resided in the ever-changing, ever fluctuating consciousness." Her novels, *To the Light House*, *The Waves* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are good experiments in the stream-of-consciousness fiction. "Life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." "Is it not" she asked, "the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." She further explains her view point about this psychological fiction in *The Common Reader*. She was aware that "life is a pure flame and we live by an invisible sun within us." On its complete illustration of this knowledge her work has an unfailing power.

Closely allied with the psychological trend in modern fiction is the tendency to employ science for purpose of romance. Science has considerably influenced the work of the modern novelists. Science has revealed to the modern novelist innumerable aspects of life and nature, and has opened new vistas of thought and imagination to be employed in fiction. The very texture of the novel has been modified by the novelist's scientific exactness of observation and scrupulous regard for details. The scientific romances of H. G. Wells such as *Time Machine*,

*The Invisible Man* are saturated in scientific love. *The Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley is a satirical exposure of the conditions brought about by science. Huxley's *The Brave New World* is written under the influence of Behaviourism or Determinism under which continual repetition of the same phenomenon gives rise to a definite type of nervous reaction which then becomes stereotyped, habitual and hereditary.

Detective fiction, popularised by Arthur Conan Doyle in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, was given a further impetus in 20th century fiction by G. K. Chesterton, Edgar Wallace, Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie. The Father Brown stories of G. K. Chesterton are very popular and so are the detective novels of Edgar Wallace such as *The Four Just Men* and *Sanders of the Rivers*.

One prominent trend in modern fiction is the growth of regionalism, which had been set in vogue by the Wessex novels of Thomas Hardy. Arnold Bennet is the best exponent of the regional novel in his tales of the Five Towns in *Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger Series*. Mary Webb chose Shropshire surroundings for her *Precious Bone*, and Sheil Kaye Smith took to Sussex in her novel *The End of the House of Alard*. Edin Philpott has brought the West Country in his regional fiction.

Biographical novels and novels dealing with family life have also won recognition in our times. *The World of William Clissoid*, *The Forstye Saga* and *Clayhanger* are representative novels in this direction.

The future of the English novel cannot be ascertained with any definiteness. The modern age is dominated by politics and science, and it is just possible that the future novelists may harness these two forces of fiction in a vigorous manner. Commenting on the future of the English novel, P. H. Newby observes—

"There is no way of knowing what kind of novels are going to be written in the future, who out of the many writers now at work will realise their promise. Writing about the future of fiction, V. S. Pritchett said that whatever happens it is reasonable to say that the interest in character for its own sake has gone, and that the real subject of the best



writing now being done is that impersonal shadow, "the contemporary situation." This does not mean that we are going to have a succession of political novels—on the contrary, that unhappy phase in English writing came to an end as soon as the war was seriously engaged—but it does imply that the very long novel which ought to present the fictional biographies of a great many people is unlikely to persist. Even now, as Rose Macaulay points out, the longest contemporary novels are, on the whole, the worst.

"In the long run the quality of a work of a fiction depends on the quality of thought of the times in which it is written. The great novelists of the past wrote well because they thought well; anyone writing fiction to-day who wishes to do so with effect must first make up his mind just where he stands, as a human being, at this moment of history. It is no longer possible for a Jane Austen to sit in a country personage writing novels of the wars and revolutions, for the wars and revolutions are so general that they cannot be ignored; and not the mere fact of war and revolution alone, but the deeper issues, the bewilderment, the confusion of loyalties, the search for belief and faith. Unless fiction is to become a toy it cannot escape these issues."

**Q. 78.** Give your estimate of the works and contribution of Henry James (1843—1916) to the modern novel.

**Ans.** Henry James, the American novelist, occupies a distinctive place in the history of the English novel. Though he died in 1916, yet he appears in many ways our contemporary. "In the history of the English novel James holds a position analogous to Flaubert's in the French; both strove to give the novel the aesthetic intensity of a great poem or a great painting."\* Henry James was a prolific writer and during his life-time he produced novels, travel sketches, short stories, criticism and autobiographical sketches. His work as a novelist falls into three groups. In the first group we include four novels, *Roderick Hudson*; *The American*, *The Europeans* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. In these novels James studies European life from the American point of view. The

\* Walter Allen : *The English Novel*.

novels of group are free from the complexity and involution of thought that crept into his later work. These novels are simple and straightforward. In the second group we place three novels dealing with English life and English character. The novels of this group are *The Tragic Muse*, *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Awkward Age*. In the third group are included James's novels of maturity and perfection dealing primarily with American life. *The Wings of Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Bostonians*, *The Princess Casamassima* are considered by Walter Allen as, "novels of a classical perfection never before achieved in English, in which practice and theory are consummately matched." In these novels James "achieves a subtlety of character-study, a delicacy of perception, and an elaboration of artistic presentation which rank them high among modern novels."\* In all these works James attempts "to explore the furthest possibilities of individual feeling, its genesis in motive, and its expression in conduct. In this attempt, he brought to the novel a slow-motion tempo, which H. G. Wells his friendly adversary, likened to the efforts of an elephant to pick up a pea."†

Besides writing these novels, James produced a number of short stories of beauty and charm dealing mostly with occult subjects. His familiar stories are *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Altar of the Dead*, *The Beast in the Jungle* and *The Birth Place*

His autobiographical writings are *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914). His critical works are *Notes on Novelists* (1914) *The Art of Fiction* (1884) and *The Note Book of Henry James* (1947). These critical writings present James's view of the novel, and its role in contemporary literature.

### Henry James As a Novelist.

#### His Theory of the Novel.

Henry James set forth his theory of the novel in his famous critical work *The Art of Fiction* (1884). According to James the main business of the novelist was to provide his impressions of

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\* E. Albert : *A History of English Literature*:

† Richard Church : *The Growth of the English Novel*

life in such a manner as to create the illusion of reality in his work. In his view the novelist was an *impressionist*, competing with, "his brother the painter in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."\* James considered that a novel should not be used for preaching or imparting moral lessons to the readers nor was it to be harnessed for propaganda purposes or purposes of social reform. "To him the novel was primarily an art form to be judged solely by artistic canons, concerned, not with moral purpose, but with the objective and impartial presentation of the reality of life."\*\*

### His Subjects.

James chose two subjects for his novels. The first is what he calls "the international subject" dealing with the relationship of the Americans and the Europeans. He found a great many of his themes "in the impact of one type of society upon the product of another, in the study of the processes of adjustment and their effect upon the development of the individual character." The second subject refers to the conflict of man with his surroundings or the social milieu. He presents certain innocent people spoiled and corrupted by a set of exploiters. The innocent persons are invariably Americans, whereas the exploiters are Europeans.

### Plot Construction.

Henry James paid no attention to the construction of his plots like the story tellers of the early Victorian age. He was essentially an impressionist and a psychologist and as such he did not very much care for coherence in his plot construction. There is very little action in the novels of James. "It is not customary with him to round off his plots. Whether the novel is long or short *it is an episode.*"†

### Intellectual Element in James.

James belonged to the intellectual school of novelists and he had little place for pure sentimentalism in his works. We feel the absence of elemental passions and sentimental emotions in his

\* Henry James : *The Art of Fiction*.

\*\* E. Albert : *A History of English Literature*,

† Walter Allen : *The English Novel*.

writings. "Mind stuff he made the controlling background of his fiction."\*

#### **As a Psychologist.**

James was a psychologist, but his method was different from that of George Eliot and George Meredith, the two prominent psychological novelists of the Victorian age. "George Eliot begins with the inner states and works her way outward, sometimes never reaching the surface at all. James begins on the outside and passes a little way beneath, reading character through feature and movement of eyes, head and limb. It is the method of Richardson to which is added the trained perception that has come with science."\*\*

#### **His Technique and Form.**

James was a great technician in fiction and "incessantly experimented with technique moving from subtlety to subtlety and from strength to strength."† He had a greater concentration on the form of fiction than its subject matter, and agreed with his pupil Mrs. Wharton that, "the fundamental difference between the amateur and the artist is in the possession of the sense of technique that is, in its broadest meaning, of the necessity of form." James cultivated the technique of psycho-analysis which was developed by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in the latter years. He evolved the technique of presenting his story "through the consciousness of a single character, discarding the ubiquity and omniscience of the traditional novelist." His novels express subtlety of feelings, and become a complex pattern of subjective impressionism. To many readers his novels appear "long-winded or affected" due to his subtle technique of presenting the impressions of his characters.

#### **His Characters.**

"The characters of Henry James belong to the brotherhood of intellectuals like himself, sensitive, refined, sophisticated, controlling impulse by reason, and endowed with a faculty of acute self-analysis. They view their own motives and reactions with a remarkable detachment and an equal degree of subtlety."‡ "His

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\* Diana Neill : A History of the English Novel

\*\* W. L. Cross : Development of the English Novel.

† Gerald Bullett : Modern English Fiction.

‡ E. Albert : History of English Literature.

people" says Richard Church, "are ephemerals hovering over a human society already showing signs of the decomposition which we see to-day in acceleration."

#### His Style.

James was an artist and like Flaubert he made strenuous efforts to search for the inevitable word and the proper image. He achieved excellence in the presentation of dialogues as in *The Awkward Age*, and it is to his credit that he could describe scenes like a true impressionist in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*. But often he bores us due to his habit of indulging in long sentences and subtle expressions revealing the inner consciousness of his characters. "It is maddening to read his prose" says Church, "but one goes on reading because of the extreme range of consciousness and the microscopic approach to the niceties of human conduct and inference."

#### James a Novelists' Novelist.

"In a sense, James is a novelist's novelist. That is to say, among writers of English Fiction, he considered the problems of imaginative narration with the most unwavering seriousness, the most scrupulous discrimination. No other English novelist has devoted so much high thoughtfulness to the problems of point of view and structure, of the infinitely nice adjustment of substance and form, of the exhaustive exploitation of carefully defined themes. In English fiction James's is the supreme technique. After him there could be no further development of the well made novel."\*

**Q. 79** What contribution was made by George Moore (1852-1933) and George Gissing (1857-1903) to Realism in modern fiction?

**Ans.** George Moore and George Gissing were realists and it was their aim to present life realistically in their works. Moore was an Irishman and early in his life he came under the influence of Zola and Flaubert, who indoctrinated him in the subtle art of presenting the reality of things in an impartial and impersonal manner. In his novels *A Modern Lover* (1893), *A Mummer's*

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

*Wife* (1885), *Spring Drays* (1888) and *Esther Waters* (1894), he made a sympathetic study of the poor people and their miserable existence. His novels present a close and realistic study of the sordid side of human life bringing to view the misery and suffering hidden beneath the upper surface of lowly living. The sympathy of the novelist is always with those whose lot it is to suffer.

The realism of Moore was tempered by his Irish mysticism and inclination for religion and some of his works such as *Evelyn Innes* (1898), *Sister Teresa* (1901), *The Brook Kerith* (1916) are tinged with mysticism.

Moore was also a psychologist and his novels reveal his grasp of character and the inner working of the minds of his characters. He provides a fine analysis of the mental states of his characters.

His characters, particularly his women, are drawn with sympathy. His *Esther Waters* presents a fine woman character, a servant who has to suffer a lot in her life.

Moore's style is generally simple and lucid and the manner in which he presents an impartial and detached study of life in an artistic language is pleasing to the readers. "An acute and critical mind, a keen observation of life, an urbane detachment, with its attendant incapacity to experience the deeper levels of emotion, a sharp and often malicious wit, and a delicate ear for the rhythm of language equipped him admirably for the exploitation of his chosen form."\*

**Gissing,**

Known for his critical study of Charles Dickens, Gissing was essentially a Realist interested in the study of the poor people and their mean and squalid existence. He did not sympathise with their lot like George Moore. He simply aimed to focus the attention of social reformers to the miseries of their unhappy living. He moves us by his pictures of the sordid and seamy side of life. He exhibited a rare skill for unflinching realism, concrete detail, and a graphic description of the people whose miserable life he sought to present in his works. He could not achieve the detachment of Moore and often coloured the annals of the poor-

with his own experiences of life. His main works are *The Nether World* (1889); *Grub Street* (1891) and *The House of Cowes* (1906), *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is autobiographical in character and presents realistic studies of 'the squalid and savage people' without much sympathy for their unhappy lot.

As an artist Gissing is inferior to George Moore. "His sense of proportion is often faulty, his plots are awkwardly constructed or spun out to an unreasonable length, his themes and characters are frequently repeated with but slight variations, his dialogue is poor and his work is almost completely lacking in the poise which comes from a sense of humour."

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**Q. 80.** Write a note on the novels of James Matthew Barrie (1860—1937) and estimate the importance of his contribution to the English Novel.

**Ans.** James Matthew Barrie, the prominent literary luminary of Scotland, was a novelist, journalist, dramatist and prose writer. Here we are mainly concerned with his work as a novelist.

Barrie was the main moving figure of "The Kailyard School" of fiction in Scotland. The title of this school came from one of Burns's songs :

*There grows a bonnie brier bush oor Kailyard.*

A Kailyard is a cabbage patch, and the phrase, 'Kailyard School' refers to the 'quainter aspects of village life.' The writers of this school of fiction sought to represent the folk-scenes of Scotland and transmuted the rural sides with the colour of their romantic imagination. The tradition had long been set by Galt in *Annals of the Parish* and it was the work of George Macdonald and Matthew Barrie to carry forward the line in their Scottish fiction.

Barrie's first novel was *Better Dead* (1887). It was a mediocre work and imitated Stevenson's *Suicide Club*. Later on he produced *Window in Thrums* (1889), *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888) in which he sought to catch the lives of the common Scottish peasants with all their rural surroundings. The best product of the Kailyard School is to be found in these works Barrie represented

the oddities of village characters with drollery and affection, and made his fiction realistic in character.

Barrie's fame rests on his famous novel *The Little Minister*. (1891). The theme of this novel is the love of a clergyman for a wayward gipsy girl who later no turns out to be a lady of fashion in the truly romantic fashion of the day. "Stevenson's technique of the onlooker-narrator is ingeniously handled, the story being told by the village school master, who is concealing the secret that he is the little minister's real father."

Apart from the *Little Minister*, Barrie's other works of importance are *Sentimental Tommy* (1896) and its sequel *Tommy and Grizel*. In these two novels Barrie made a desperate attempt to achieve psychological realism. The hero Tommy Sandys is gifted with a creative energy. He is a lively man of imagination and sentimentalism and fails to adjust himself with the realities of life. In the first volume Barrie deals with the boyhood days of Tommy. He brings out his insight and humour in the presentation of Tommy's life as a boy at school. In the second volume Barrie presents "a strong contrast between Tommy's emotional instability and the quiet fortitude of the girl who loved him. Barrie admired Meredith as warmly as Stevenson, and the evils of sentimentalism are castigated in this pair of stories with all Meredith's vindictiveness."\* Barrie was himself a sentimentalist and the charm of the books lies in 'a sentimental exposure of a sentimentalist.' "The unexpected violence of the last scene, when Tommy is accidentally hanged by his overcoat suggests by its ambiguous mixture of grotesque absurdity and Hardian-ironic chance that Barrie was trying to symbolise the destructive contradictions in his own nature."\*\*

From the field of fiction Barrie turned to the world of drama. The success of the *Little Minister* on the stage in its dramatised form turned Barrie into a playwright, and his subsequent career was divided between plays and stories for children. In *Peter Pan* he dramatised *Sentimental Tommy* and achieved great success.



**Q. 81. Give your estimate of Samuel Butler (1835—1902) as a novelist and write a note on his principal works.**

**Ans.** "Samuel Butler was one of the most original and belligerent thinkers of the nineteenth century. He was "the literary bad boy of the Victorians, whom he scandalized almost as badly as his name sake had scandalized the Puritans, and for the same reason because he understood neither idealism nor the moral earnestness from which it sprang."\* The earlier Samuel delayed printing *Hudibras* for fear of consequences to himself; the later Samuel refused to publish his work, scornfully asking, "What is the use of addressing people who will not listen?" So it happened that he was not widely known or even 'discovered' until the Victorian age had passed into history.\*\* Samuel Butler was a prolific writer and wrote novels, travel tales and prose treatises. Some of his works *Life and Habit* (1877), *Evolution Old and New* (1879), *Unconscious Memory*, (1880) were inspired by the Darwinian theory of evolution and exhibit the scientific trend of his thought. His classical interests are well reflected in *The Trapanese Origin of the Odyssey*, in which he sought to prove that Homeric poems particularly *Odyssey* were written by a woman Nausicca who had a poor opinion of Greek heroes. His other works are *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino* (1881), *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (1899), *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* (1896), *Essays on Life Art and Science* (1904).

The fame of Samuel Butler rests on three works *Erewhon* (1872) and its sequel *Erewhon Revisited* and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). In these novels Butler blazed a new trail which ran counter to the prevailing tendencies of the age. "At a time when serious novelists were accepting James's condemnation of the omniscient author, Butler's book (*The Way of All Flesh*) was dominated by his opinions and prejudices. When other novelists were attentive to form and structure, Butler's book sprawled over several generations and suffered a major fracture half way through. When other novelists were depending upon accumulation of detail and imitation of colloquial speech to produce the illusion of reality,

\* Lionel Stevenson : *The English Novel, a Panorama*.

\*\* W. J. Long : *English Literature*.

Butler often contented himself with bald summary of both scene and conversation."\*

*Erewhon*, the title of which is an anagram for *nowhere* is a satirical utopia on modern civilization, its treatment of crime, poverty and sickness. It fulminates against machinery and the dependence of man on machinery. The Erewhonians in their wisdom had banished machinery, the bane of modern civilization. In the character of the Erewhonians there were certain virtues which Butler found lacking in modern society. They had good nature and were urbane and compromising in their attitude. Butler wanted the people of his times to cultivate some of the virtues of the Erewhonians, and discard priggishness and bigotry which were considered taboos in the land of the Erewhonians.

*Erewhon* or *Over the Range* is a work of semi-fiction and "cannot be counted as a novel since plot and characterisation are subordinated to a satire upon modern civilization in the guise of a visit to an innocent Utopia in the New Zealand wilderness"\*\*

The sequel to *Erewhon* is *Erewhon Revisited*. It is a more compact and unified work. It is largely based on the author's disbelief in the doctrine of Ascension, represented in the book by Sunchildism. The book represents the reactions of Higgs to the credulity of the Erewhonians who had grafted Sunchidism on their old religion, and started believing in the doctrine of man's ascension into heaven.

*The Way of All Flesh* is a work of revolt against Victorianism and though written between (1872-84) was published after the author's death in 1903 because, "it dealt so intimately and so scathingly with his own family and upbringing." "*The Way of all Flesh* is an example of the novel as delayed action bomb. Even so, even after 1903, it might have laid, inert for years if Bernard Shaw had not touched it off. Then it suddenly exploded and out of the debris a novel of a new kind emerged, or rather, a novel with a new subject and a new hero."† This novel is somewhat autobiographical in character, and its hero Ernest Pontifex represents the views and opinions of the author.

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\* Lionel Stevenson : *The English Novel*.

\*\* Ibid.

† Walter Allen : *The English Novel*.

The father and uncle of Ernest Pontifex believed in parental authority. They were true Victorians. They wanted Pontifex to become a clergyman much against his will. For sometime Pontifex proved weak and submissive to parental authority but later on he revolted against the tyranny of his father. He kicked up the religious life which was sought to be imposed on him and fell a prey to passion and carnal desires. He went the way of all flesh. He managed to insult a young woman whom he took for a prostitute, and was sentenced to six months imprisonment. On coming back from the prison he started flirtation with Ellen, a maid servant and fell on evil ways. He was rescued from this life of fleshliness by his aunt who left him good fortune. Later on Pontifex devoted himself to literature. There was a transformation in his life.

The hero Pontifex represents Samuel Butler and the novel is partially autobiographical. It is not a complete and truthful representation of Butler's life. There are many points of difference between Butler and Pontifex. Like Pontifex, Butler was never sent to prison nor did he ever engage himself in business as an old clothes' dealer.

The novel is evidently an attack on Darwinian determinism and advocates self-determinism. It aims to expose the shams, the parental authority, and traditional smugness of the Victorians. It is noted for its frankness and is marked with typical Butlerian wit and irony.

Butler became the leader of younger novelists who were bent upon flouting Victorian taboos and rituals. "Butler carried the assault into the citadel of entrenched respectability by insisting that the self-righteous Philistines (Victorians) were themselves cruel, greedy, stupid and hypocritical and, above all, that the most cherished stronghold of Victorian morality, the family, was a machine of sadistic tyranny that perpetuated these evils from one generation to the next. As a scientific rationalist, Butler subjected the sentimental sanctions of the home and parental love and filial duty to a chilly anthropological scrutiny, and as an evolutionist he traced the ancestry of his central character to show how the dominant patterns of conduct emerged. The demolition of domestic harmony was all the more thorough by being

reinforced by Butler's antipathy to Christian faith in general and the church of England in particular. His revengeful sense of outrage prevented his book from being an impartial array of evidence and gave it a demonic energy that no reader could ignore."\*

**Q. 82.** Write a note on the novels and stories of Rudyard Kipling (1865—1936) and assess his worth as a Novelist.

**Ans.** Rudyard Kipling was a prolific and versatile writer. He was a poet, a journalist, a novelist and a teller of tales.

As a novelist he is known by *The Light That Failed*. It was produced when Kipling was twenty four years of age. The hero of the novel is a young man who goes blind but still manages to lead a strenuous life. The blindness of the hero has some poignancy for it reveals Kipling's own anxiety for his own waning eyesight. "The scenes of London journalistic life and of desert warfare in Africa have reportorial 'effectiveness; but the idealizing of the army and of men of action—a compensation for the author's frustration of being debarred from a military career—betrays a tone of immaturity that is less perceptible in his short stories, even when they convey the same values."\*\* Kipling's next work in fiction is *The Naulakha*. It was written in collaboration with his American brother-in-law, but it could not claim much success.

Kipling achieved distinction in tales and stories. *Kim* presents the experiences of a boy who wandered over India in the company of a holy man. This work gives a realistic picture of Indian life and the faith of the people in supernaturalism and mysticism. This long narrative tale, "reverts to the episodic story line of the picaresque romance."† *Captains Courageous* is an adventurous story for boys dealing with a boy who fell overboard from a ship and was saved by a schooner from the Gloucester fishing fleet. "In *The Plain Tales From the Hills*, Kipling presents the adventures of British soldiers in Simla, and the prosaic lot of the civil servants and their sense of duty. *Soldiers Three* brings out the story

\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama*.

\*\* Ibid.

† Lionel Stevenson : *The English Novel*.

of Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, "eternal types of the hard-drinking, loose-talking men in the ranks." *The Phantom-Rickshaw* is about Simla and the sad doings that have brought the place in disrepute. *Puck of Pook's Hill* and its sequel *Rewards and Fairies* present "a new amalgam of history with the magic transfigures and interprets." *The Jungle Books* deal with the life of the Indian forests with extreme realism tinged with an air of romance. Mowgli, Baloo and Bagheera are the lovable characters of the *Jungle Books* even though two are quadrupeds.

#### **Kipling As A Realist and A Romancer.**

Kipling was both a realist and a romancer. He gave the air of realism by his settings as well as by his characters, but real realism he lacked. In his works, there is realism without reality. He was an impressionist rather than a realist, and his pictures of realism were marked with an air of romance. He was also a romanticist, but instead of finding romance in the past and the Middle Ages, he found romance in the present realities of life. "He is the romancer of the present, of the modern social order, on which shines from afar a light as resplendent as that which shone on medieval society, for it is the same light of the imagination. Kipling feels the presence of romance in shot and shell as well as in bow and arrows and in red coats as well in buff jerkins."\*

#### **Indian Life.**

Kipling's tales are saturated with Indian touches. He was the first interpreter of Indian life to the West. He is to India what Maria Edgeworth was to Ireland and somewhat less than Scott was to Scotland. In Kipling's stories we come across the India of magic and superstition, the India of lions and snakes, the India of famine and pestilence. He has given pictures of life in the Punjab with its sweltering heat and the madness induced thereby. India is reflected in *Kim*, *The Man Who Was*, *The Head of the District*, *The Phantom-Rickshaw* and *Jungle Books*.

#### **Imperialistic Note.**

Kipling was an imperialist at heart and the note of imperialism is sounded in his works with a touch of jingoism. "His insistent proclamation of the superiority of the white races, of

Britain's undoubted mission to extend through her imperial policy the benefits of civilization to the rest of the world, his belief in progress and the value of the machine found an echo in the hearts of many of his readers."\*

#### **Note of Adventure.**

Kipling's tales are marked with a note of adventure, activity, self sacrifice and loyalty. He imparted to fiction the air of vitality and invigorating salt. The adventures of his soldiers are thrilling.

#### **Laureate of the Animal World**

Kipling was the laureate of the animal world. He interpreted the conduct of wolves, bears, panthers, monkeys, serpents and elephants and translated their language into English.

#### **Journalistic Note.**

The entire work of Kipling is marked with a journalistic note. "It is the journalistic *flair* that enables him to be Laureate of the music hall; that gives him actuality, clarity and conciseness as a writer whether in prose or verse. It is the journalistic *flair* that leads him to be overgenerous with banjo strains and overladen some of his prose with irrelevancies."\*\*

**Q. 83. Give your estimate of Arnold Bennet (1867—1931) as a Novelist and write a critical note on his principal works.**

**Ans.** Arnold Bennett was, "an all-round man of letters, a personality and a power." He was a prolific writer and wrote novels, short stories, little books of 'pocket philosophies', dramas and critical reviews. He has to his credit more than eighty volumes, but all of them are not of equal significance. He is known for his *The Old Wives Tale*, *Clayhanger Trilogy*, *Riceyman Steps* and *Imperial Paiaice*. We will now examine these works in some detail.

#### **The Old Wives Tale (1903).**

The origin of the novel *The Old Wives' Tale* is to be traced to Arnold Bennett's experience of an old lady who entered a Paris restaurant throwing the waitress and the customers in guffaws of laughter. Bennett enjoyed the sight of this stout queer woman

1. Albert : A History of English Literature.

Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature.

who might have been once young, slim, perhaps beautiful, though now she had grown fat, old and shabby. At once, in a flash, the possibility of portraying a woman fresh in her youth and later on in her senile decay came to Bennett. "Taking Maupassant's *Une Vie* as a model, he determined to tell the truth about such a woman in "a heart-rending novel" and the thought that he might excel Maupassant by giving the interwoven histories of two sisters."

*The Old Wives Tale* is a long panorama of the lives of two sisters, Constance and Sophia Baines, daughters of a draper in one of the Five Towns. Constance, the prosaic young woman, leads an unromantic life in the humdrum and drab atmosphere of the Five Towns, whereas her sister Sophia, having an overdose of romance in her character, goes off to Paris with a worthless adventurer to enrich her experience of life. The two sisters do not meet for long, and when they did they were old and had lost the charm of youth. Time had added lines to their faces and ache to their ageing limbs. At the end both the sisters die leaving behind a tragedy of heart rending pathos.

The novel has been called *The Old Wives' Tale*, because Bennett emphasised in this novel the tragedy of growing old. The book is pretty long and detailed and it succeeds in giving the illusion of covering half a century without undue condensation. It is not devoid of thrilling and exciting episodes such as the description of the public guillotining in Paris but the total effect is the accumulation of everyday events that make up the passage of time. For all its drabness, the book is not depressing. The two sisters have family likeness. They are obstinate and strong-willed. In their old age when they are finally reunited, "the effect is not so much the pathos of age and weakness as the triumph of the indomitable will to live."\*

In the Clayhanger Trilogy—*Clayhanger*, *Hilda Lessway*, *These Twain*—the scene is that of Staffordshire, and the events centre round the affairs of Edwin Clayhanger and Hilda Lessway who are united in *These Twain*. "Fertility of invention, integrity of vision and fine craftsmanship combine to make it a very solid

\* Lionel Stevenson : The English Novel.

and satisfying of piece work.”\*

In *Old Wives Tale* and *Clayhanger Trilogy* Bennett had kept close to the Five Towns and had described the industrial life of the people with their insistence on love, marriage, housekeeping, moneymaking, illness and death. In his *Riceyman Steps* (1923) he left the Five Towns for the dreary London district of Clearkenwell and instead of dealing with the lives of industrial people in the pottery districts, he now focussed attention on the relatively abnormal psychology of a miser, Henry Earlforward, a bookseller, lost in the craze of moneymaking. Materialism has its full play in the novel. The miser dies of cancer at the end. This book is dismal in character and is written about dismal people in dismal surroundings. A. C. Ward is an admirer of this novel and says—“Despite its drabness, the book is illumined by that sense of beauty which is indispensable to the creative artist.”\*\*

In *Imperial Palace*, Bennett describes a hotel, with all its fascinating and enthralling details. To obviate the boredom, the novelist introduced romantic and human interest in the book. The novel should be read by all those who intend to start hotel business in their lives. The novel has a special significance for Arnold Bennett. It has a symbolic significance. The world was for Bennett a sumptuous hotel, with marble bathrooms and a marvellous cusine, in which he considered himself a transient guest. “To him life was a role that he played conscientiously, and with ability, but into the skin of which he could never quite go.” (S. Maugham).

The views of Somerset Maugham about these novels of Bennett are worthy of consideration. He says, “The *Old Wives Tale* is certainly the best book he wrote. He never lost the desire to write another as good and because it was written by an effort of will he thought he could repeat it. He tried in *Clayhanger*, and for a time it looked as though he might succeed. I think he failed only because his material fizzled out. After *The Old Wives Tale* he had not enough left to complete the vast structure he had designed. No writer can get more than a certain amount of ore out of one seam.”

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\* Gerald Bullett : *Modern English Fiction*.

\*\* A. C. Ward : *Twentieth Century Literature*.



**AS A NOVELIST****As a Realist.**

Arnold Bennett was essentially a Realist in his art and realism is well brought out in the vivid and real pictures of the pottery districts of England or in his study of the Five Towns. The life of materialism is well portrayed in his novels. The internal economy of houses and hotels down to their plumbing, food as bought, prepared and eaten, clothes and their fashions, means of transport, indeed all the machinery equipment and paraphernalia of living claimed Bennett's absorbed interest.\* Bennett became an interpreter of the society of the Five Towns which he knew well. But it is to his credit that like a true artist he maintained an air of impartiality and detachment in the presentation of real pictures in his novels. He did not aim at any propaganda or moral preaching through the medium of his art.

**As A Romancer.**

Bennett introduced romanticism centring on the theme of love to take away the impression of drabness, dullness and sordidness that might be created from the study of his realist pictures of life.

Besides finding romance in love, Bennett like Kipling found romance in the ordinary things of life. He refused to identify romance 'with the merely picturesque or the merely extraordinary.' God had endowed him with the ability and the faculty of "evoking the beauty and romance of the ordinary lives of ordinary folk which is one of the most attractive features of his novels."\*\*

**His Characters.**

The characters of Arnold Bennett belong to the middle class society and the novelist shows insight in presenting them in his works. There is not that depth and psychological penetration in his character portrayal as we find in Henry James. His heroines are better drawn than his male characters. Sophia, Constance, Hilda attract us more than their male counterparts.

**His style.**

"Bennett's conspicuous failing was disregard for the grace"

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

\*\* Gerald Bullett—Modern English Fiction.

of style. He wrote fluently and vigorously and often achieved marvels of pictorial and nerve-shaking description. But he seemed to be insensible to the finer elegancies, and to despise that scrupulous attention to the consecrated order and dignity of the language which is the mark of the man of letters. This carelessness, however, was not a handicap when it came to writing dialogue. It is in his vivid and eminently natural conversations that Arnold Bennett's master-strokes of style are to be found.\* "His dialogue is usually excellent, but he appears to be insensitive to the finer graces of the English language, and his prose compares unfavourably with that of Galsworthy.\*\*

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**Q. 84.** Write a note on the novels of John Galsworthy (1867-1933) and his contribution to the English Novel.

**Ans.** John Galsworthy was one of the prominent men of letters during the 20th century. He was a man of versatile genius and achieved distinction in varied branches of literature. He was a novelist, a dramatist, a journalist, an essayist and a short story writer.

As a novelist Galsworthy began his career at the age of thirty and his first book *From the Four Winds*, was published under the name of John Sinjohn. It was a beginner's work and was immature in every way. It was followed by *Jocelyn* (1891) and later on by *Villa Rubein* (1900) in which he sought to introduce the detachment and impartiality of Flaubert and Turgenev, masters in the art of novel writing. In *Villa Rubein* Galsworthy is a pure artist without any moral or social purposiveness. "*Villa Rubein* has a charm and restraint which were we speaking the language of pictorial art, might make us say that it was an admirable example of the school of Turgenev."† In the works that followed, Galsworthy turned his gaze to social, political and economic life, and standing on the *Middle line* he made his observations on what he saw.

Galsworthy produced his first great successful novel *The man*

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\* F. A. Baker—History of the English Novel

\*\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

† R. A. Scott James—Fifty Years of English Literature

of *Property* (1906) which formed the first book of the family novel *The Forsyte Saga*. This Saga is divided into two trilogies. In the first trilogy we include *The Man of Property* (1906), *In Chancery* (1920) and *To Let* (1921). It was followed by a 'Second Trilogy of the Forste Chronicle' and contained three novels *The White Monkey* (1924), *The Silver Spoon* (1926) and *Swan-Song* (1928) which were published later on in one volume designated, as *A Modern Comedy*. There were also two *interludes* in this omnibus work—*The Forsyte Saga*. In this great work Galsworthy presents a vivid and clear picture of the Victorians particularly the upper middle class people, the Forsytes, who had infinite love for property, social dignity, material pelf and power. The possessive instinct of the Victorians is clearly brought out in this novel. Soames Forsyte considers his wife Irene as his property. "For Forsytes what cannot be bought does not exist; art and the things of the spirit are objects to be collected, but not for their own sake, rather as manifestations of their success in life. The life of the emotions, the holiness of the heart's affections are as closed to them as the life of pure thought. Theirs was the life of making money, reaching, keeping dogs, fighting law suits, drinking and walking."\* The life of the Victorians has a ring of truth about it and Galsworthy's handling of the subject is really admirable. "The reader becomes the privileged onlooker at a scene so varied and natural as to give the illusion of the fullness of life within the broad limits of Forste society."†

The other novels of Galsworthy are social in character and reveal his interest in contemporary society. In *The Country House* he attacks, once again, the lust for property. *Fraternity* deals with class division, the distinction between the rich and the poor, and the disaster that follows in the wake of misunderstanding. It is a very unhappy book. In *The Patrician* Galsworthy throws light on the gradual liquidation of the upper middle classes and the emergence of the new social order.

"In this series novels, as in his plays, which were even more successful during the same years, Galsworthy wrote, as

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\* Walter Allen : *The English Novel*.

† Dr. A. S. Collins : *English Literature of the 20th Century*.

befitted his subject matter, with urbane and mildly ironic realism. But under the calm, gentlemanly surface it is easy to perceive his almost unendurable pity for the people who are caught in the trap of rigid conventions, and his hopelessness as to any solution. As he saw it, the cultivated classes of England were doomed to sterile unhappiness by their tradition-bound and materialistic principles. None of his books has a dramatically tragic ending, but all are as depressing as Gissing's in their depiction of normal emotions thwarted by social environment."\*

#### As A Novelist

##### A Novelist of social life.

Galsworthy was primarily the novelist of social life, and was interested in the presentation of the Victorian scene, particularly belonging to the upper middle class society. His *Forsyte Saga* is a vivid and clear picture of Victorian life representing their love for property and possession. "As the social historian of the passing away of Victorianism, Galsworthy is still without a serious rival. Their code of honour, their snobbishness, their distrust of passion find an adequate expression in his novels." Contrasting Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy as novelists of social life Scott James nicely remarks, "Galsworthy belonged to the so-called upper classes, and was most at his ease in describing the life of the country or people of inherited wealth living in London. Bennett belonged to the humbler middle class and was most successful when writing of people who belonged to it."

##### Galsworthy's Technique.

Galsworthy's technique in presenting the picture of society was that of observing the spectacle of life from the middle of the road, keeping his balance dexterously without tilting either on this or that side. He presented "the spectacle of life and its contending forces, himself standing in the middle, like Fate, holding the balance." He followed the method adopted by his character Cethru (see through) in the *Inn of Tranquillity*. This method of Cethru (see through) is perceptible in all his later works. "He created a new type of fiction by "balancing" as he said, the virtues and vices of his hero, Soames, against the vices and virtues of other members of the same family, a method to which

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\* Lionel Stevenson - The English Novel, a Panorama.

he held in his subsequent novels and plays.”\*

#### **As a Novelist of Passion and Love.**

Galsworthy was interested not only in the study of social relations, but also in the depiction of passion and love in his novels. Love motif dominates his novels. He took keen interest in describing youthful passion, lawful, or unlawful and his love scenes between Bosinney and Irene, Jon and Fleur, Dinny and Wilfred, Gyp and Bryan, have something of the true passion of youth, “something fresh and holy, a breath of summer blossom, sunshine or spring rain.” His novels of love end on a note of tragedy.

#### **Galsworthy’s Characters.**

Galsworthy achieved signal success in portraying his characters mostly drawn from upper middle class society. He exhibited an unerring insight in bringing out the vices and virtues of their life. Among his male characters representing the love for Victorian property and possession are Soames Forsyte, Old Joylon, James, General Charwell, uncle Hilary and Adrian. His female characters are marked with a love for romanticism. Irene is “the spirit of universal beauty, deep, mysterious.” Fleur, “the flower of Soame’s life” and Dinny “the smile on the face of the country.” Helen Bellew, Gyp, Holly, Ann, are his other vivacious and glamorous heroines. Galsworthy’s child characters are innocent, funny and sweet. We remember Jon, Kit, and little Gyp for their innocence and simplicity.

#### **Galsworthy’s Satire and Irony.**

Galsworthy was a satirist and ironically he attacked the instinct of possessiveness and material affluence found among the Victorians. He could not appreciate the heartlessness and lack of emotional understanding which characterised the smug and self complacent Victorians. The following passage from the *Forsyte Saga* will reveal to the reader the ironical verve with which Galsworthy pictured their insensitiveness and lack of sympathy—“In his eyes, as in the eye of all Forsytes, the pleasure of seeing these beautiful creatures in a state of captivity far outweighed the inconvenience of imprisonment to beasts whom God had so unprovidently placed

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\* W, J, Long—English Literature,

\*\* Scott-James—Fifty Years of English Literature.

in a state of freedom ! It was for the animal's good, removing them at once from the countless dangers of open air and exercise and enabling them to exercise their functions in the guaranteed, seclusion of a private compartment ! Indeed, it was doubtful what wild animals were made for but to be shut up in cages !"

#### **Galsworthy's Interest in Nature and Animals.**

The novels of Galsworthy reveal his interest in nature and animals. His descriptions of the English countryside are graphic and poetic. His love for nature is best shown in *The Dark Flwer*. Bosinney and Irene frequently visit the parks of London. Sussex Down, the riverside, form the background of the love of Fleur and Jon.

#### **Galsworthy's Philosophy and Didacticism.**

Galsworthy suggested through his novels the lesson of sympathy and humanitarianism. He suggested patience, forbearance, kindness, and generosity as the possible cure for the maladies infecting our society.

#### **Galsworthy's Style.**

"The style of Galsworthy matches his material. It has the best qualities of the Forsyte spirit, and something more. It is a civilized style, quiet, reticent, and assured, without tricks or fuss. It has a grace and dignity which never assert themselves too much. Irony and a sensitive reaction to atmosphere continually prevent any dulling of the tranquil surface. When beauty asks it, an almost poetic glow and pulsation inform to still normal prose. When passion and deep feeling need expression, a close restraint of phrasing, a quiet concentration of meaning, produce the required effect. Without apparent striving he can move the emotionally deeply."\*

#### **Conclusion.**

"Today it is easier to see him as a whole—to recognize that for a dozen years he was an active force in awakening Edwardian England from intellectual lethargy : a man of letters devoted to the conception of literature as an art, yet equally convinced that it has a social function to fulfil; a man of great strength of purpose, of generous impulses, modest in his thought and in his manner to others; chivalrous in his sympathy for the weak, but with the

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins—*English Literature of the Twentieth Century*.

good sense never to confine his sympathies to a class. Before his death he had reached the last stage of success at which a man's work has been so much read, and become so familiar, that it is apt to be looked upon as '*passe*.' It was then that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature."\*

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**Q. 85.** Give a brief account of the main works of H. G. Wells (1866—1946).

**Ans.** H. G. Wells was one of the most prolific writers of the modern age. He was a novelist, journalist, pamphleteer and a writer of serious books. Over production was the bane of his life because he could not keep up uniformity of excellence in all his works.

The main works of H. G. Wells fall under three divisions or groups. In the first group which extends from 1895 to 1908, we have novels characterised by fantasy and imagination. In the second group are placed the novels of character and humour. In the third group we have the novels of discussion and social commentary. We will deal with the works of each group in some detail.

### I Group

**Fantastic, scientific and imaginative novels.**

H. G. Wells started his career as a novelist by writing fantastic and scientifically imaginative novels. The works of this period, extending from 1895 to 1908 were written under the inspiration received by the study of the fantastic and imaginative tales of Jules Verns, the continental writer of romances. There was a difference in the method and practice of Jules Verns and H. G. Wells. 'Whereas fantastic adventurousness counted for everything in Jules Verns, in Wells it was more than a peg upon which to hang the speculation and social inquiry.'\*\* His first book of fiction belonging to this group is *Time Machine*. It describes a contrivance based on the theory that time is the fourth dimension. Travelling on the *Time Machine* we go back to the year 1802 and 1701 when the process of natural selection had achieved perfection. At that time the human race was

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\* R. A. Scott-James—*Fifty Years of English Literature*,

\*\* A. C. Ward—*Twentieth Century Literature*

divided into two species, a hyper civilized type descended from the leisured class, and a bestial type, descended from the workers. These workers lived underground and ate the elegant, ineffectual 'Eloit'. 'Travelling on the *Time Machine* we go far into the future when we find the whole process of evolution completely reversed. Giant Crustaceans represent the highest form of life. Immediately after this book Wells produced *The Wonderful Visit* in which "an angel is shot down by an ornithological parson and is puzzled by "the littleness, the narrow horizons, of ordinary people's lives."

The next work of H. G. Wells in this group was the *Island of Dr. Moreau*. This is a gruesome story of a surgeon who carried on the work of operating upon dogs and pigs and transforming them into human beings. Wells made a departure from this work of scientific fantasy in *The Wheels of Chance* in which he described the life of a draper's assistant, recounting mostly his own experiences of life. Wells returned to the subject of science in the *The Invisible Man* (1897) in which he tells us of a medicine which could make man invisible. In this story of tragic pathos Wells narrates how the invisible man is smelt out by a dog and is brutally done to death by the policeman working on his trail. *The War of the Worlds*, "probably the most gripping of this series describes an invasion by space-ships from Mars, with a tremendous eyewitness report of the evacuation of London." *The First Man in the Moon* provides an interesting study of the efforts made to inhabit the moon. Several difficulties come in the way of reaching the moon. The first difficulty in reaching the moon is conquered by the discovery of 'Cavorite' a substance 'opaque to all forms of radiant energy' and therefore to gravity by the scientist Cavor. *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) "uses the Rip Van Winkle theme for a forecast of the world to hundred years in the future, a time of mechanized efficiency and political dictatorship, when capital and labour fight a war to the death with airplanes."

Commenting upon these early works of H. G. Wells Lionel Stevenson beautifully remarks, "These early works of Wells are in the category of Stevensonian romance. The imaginative escape into the future is equivalent to Kipling's and



Haggard's excursions into Asia and Africa and the historical novelist's idealizing of the past. The intensity of suspense and the solving of scientific riddles resemble the Sherlock Holmes stories. There is an element of terror, notably in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, that harks back to the Gothic romances, recalling the Rosicrucian stories, *Frankenstein*, and Bulwer-Lytton's experiments with the supernatural. Wells's stories appealed particularly to men and boys, by the combination of exciting adventure with technological detail. Coming at a time when education was spreading rapidly and scientific research was invading the newspapers, his books had an incalculable influence by casting an imaginative glamour over the new knowledge, just as Haggard and Kipling were enthralling other youths with the vision of imperialism."\*

## II Group

### Novels of character and humour (1900—1910).

The first work of this period was *Love and Mr. Lewisham*. It is a painstaking work and is rich in autobiographical references depicting Wells's life as a teacher. *Kipps* (1905) recounts the experiences of Wells as a draper's assistant. It is the story of a man who is almost driven to commit suicide because of certain business difficulties from which he is providentially saved. Kipps and Polly are fine characters of H. G. Wells. Polly is a richer character and is more attractive than Kipps. Through this character the author directs our attention to the shortcomings of the system of education prevailing at this time. Mr. Polly is a true comic character and the only other character who can be compared with him in comicality is Joyce's Leopold Bloom.

*Ann Veronica* (1909) is the study of feminist movement culminating in the suffrage. "This novel incurred condemnation as immoral because it depicted an attractive girl, who after living alone and trying vainly to make a career in business, takes a mate without the formality of marriage."

*Tono Bungay* is another significant novel of this period. "It is a satiric account of how a young man of scientific leanings becomes invalid with his unprincipled uncle Pondevero in manufacturing a worthless patent medicine, *Too Bungay*, which

\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama*.

makes them rich through spectacular advertisement."

### III Group

#### The Discussion Novels or Commentaries (1901—1942).

The novels of this period are based on discussions of social problems. *Marriage* (1912) "repeats the situation of the Lydgates in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. A man is obliged to give up scientific research and go into business to satisfy the demands of an extravagant wife." In the second novel of this period *The Passionate Friends* (1913) "a woman tries to solve the old dilemma of love versus material advantage by marrying the prosperous suitor and then having relations with the other." *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1914) admits a modicum of comedy in depicting a lady of rank and fashion who alleviates the dull conventional routine by taking part in the campaign for women's suffrage and by encouraging a susceptible author to fall in love with her.

"Alongside of these four studies of love and marriage, Wells published two on the more intractable subject of political ideas. *The New Machiavelli* is the autobiography of a politician who plays a central role in public life until his career is ruined when he deserts his wife for a mistress. The book contains satiric portraits of prominent figures of the time, including some of Wells's former associates in the Fabian Society. After this ferocious exposure of incompetence in government, he offered a constructive proposal in *The Research Magnificent*, in which an idealist undertakes to make himself into a selfless and fearless leader who will help to create a World State, but loses his life in a strike riot before has a chance to put his theories into practice."\*

Besides these political works Wells produced many other works of political significance of which the *Elements of Reconstruction* (1916), *Salvaging of Civilization* (1921) and *Washington in the Hope of Peace* are quite significant. Throughout the thirties Wells was busy in producing books dealing with economic, political and social subjects. His main works in this direction are *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931), *After Democracy* (1932), *The Anatomy of Frustration* (1936). The second

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\* Lionel Stevenson—*The English Novel, a Panorama*.

world war brought other treatises, the chief of them being *The Fate of Homo Sapiens* (1939), *The New World Order* (1940), *The Right of Man* (1940), *The Common Sense of War and Peace* (1940), *Science and the World-Mind* (1942).

This period of almost thirty years was not, however, devoted entirely to pamphleteering and in addition to his popular educational works *The Outline of History* (1920) and *A Short History of the World* (1922), novels continued to flow from his pen. Many of the novels written during the thirties approached the manner of his maturity, and include *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* (1930), the *Bulphington of Blunt* (1933), *Brynhild* (1937), *Apropos of Dolores* (1938), *The Holy Terror* (1939).

**Q. 86. Give your estimate of H. G. Wells as a novelist and as a thinker.**

**Ans.** H. G. Wells (1866—1946) was a prolific writer and produced novels, pamphlets, histories, stories and romances with unceasing regularity.

**Wells's conception of the Novel.**

Wells had his own ideas about the nature and function of fiction. He did not consider the novel as a mere matter of relaxation and entertainment. He considered the novel a powerful instrument of moral and social regeneration. In his view the novel has to be regarded as the "social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of laws and institutions and of social dogmas and ideas. It is to be the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of self questioning. We are going to deal with political questions and religious questions. Before we have done we will have all life within the scope of the novel."\* Wells made the novel an instrument of social, political and educational discussion, criticism and reform.

**Formlessness in Wells's Novels.**

H. G. Wells did not very much believe in giving a story

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\* H. G. Wells—*The Contemporary Novel* (1911).

well planned and well executed in his novels. In his *Modern Utopia* he stated, "I do not see why I should always pander to the vulgar appetite for stark stories." In his view a novel was "a discursive thing, a woven tapestry of multifarious interests" in which could be included all kinds of topics such as business, finance, politics etc. He conceived the novel as "a large and affair, a kind of rag-bag into which any odds and ends of observation and opinion might be stuffed haphazardly."\*

#### As a Scientific Romancer.

His novels belonging to the first group (from 1895 to 1908) such as *Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Man in the Moon*, *The Food of the Gods*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, deal with scientific subjects in a fantastic way. The imagination of the novelist is seen in its full play in these fantastic novels marked with imaginative insight into the possibility of things under the influence of science. In these novels he is very much like Jules Verns and R. L. Stevenson.

#### As a critic of social life.

H. G. Wells did not keep himself engaged in the world of scientific fantasies for long and soon drifted from that kingdom to the wilder field of social life. He became a social critic and attacked social evils with the vehemence of a reformer. In the *History of Mr. Polly* he exposed educational impostures and in *Tono Bungay* he attacked modern commercialism. His method as a social reformer was different from that of Charles Dickens, the social reformer of the nineteenth century fiction. Whereas Dickens attempted to gain his objects of social reform through persuasion, Wells adopted the attitude of a bully and a hector in achieving his ends. "When he (Wells) laughed at abuses he was a second Dickens; when he grew fretful over them, he became a second-rate edition of himself. And he was perhaps the first of that army of propagandist writers that, more particularly in the nineteen thirties, endeavoured to hector rather than to persuade and convince."\*\*

#### Wells's Characters.

Wells created a rich variety of characters—men, women

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\* Gerald Bullett—Modern English Fiction.

\*\* A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

and children in his novels. But his chief skill lies in the presentation of odd, eccentric and humorous characters such as Uncle Ponderevo in *Tono Bungay* and Mr. Polly in the *History of Mr. Polly*. His characters have mostly been drawn from the lower middle society and constitute the "little man" of our social circle. His heroines are modern girls exhibiting "just a contemporary variation of the feminine life force, conditioned at first by her need to play up to the hero's ideals." His heroes are young, "full of strong indistinct desires and fears and a gnawing indefinable impatience." Wells's children are more natural, and they seem to be free from the pressure of his ideas. Wells has given the liveliest sketches of childhood and his pictures of children are as lively and interesting as those of George Eliot.

"With all his faults of temper and temperament, he possesses, perhaps in a higher degree than any other living Englishman the distinctive power of the novelist, that of creating people. Herein lies his incontestable claim to greatness. For sheer creative energy he has been compared, and not absurdly, with Dickens."\*

#### Wells's Humour.

"The humour of Wells is unique. It is not the eccentric wit and fun of Dickens, nor the sneering, cutting satire of Thackeray or Butler. It is not the polished epigrammatic comedy of Meredith. It is nearer to the worldly, ordinary humour of Arnold Bennett, rather than to the exuberant slangy humour of P. G. Wodehouse. It ripples the corners of one's mouth but seldom makes us roar aloud as does the humour of Dickens, Jerome Barry Pain or Herbert Jenkins. Though we cannot say that he hides his tears under the garb of a smile as does Charles Lamb, yet often his humour makes serious things."

#### As a Thinker.

"Wells was concerned above all things with contemporary problems, and he ranks with Shaw as a leader of advanced thought of his day. As a socialist he was concerned first with reconstruction of modern society on a more equitable basis, and this he felt to be attainable only through the spread of education. This belief led him to produce not only his many treatises but also the

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\* Gerald Bullett—Modern English Fiction

popular educational works on science. Educational opportunities and political equality for women were among the causes he supported, and though his plans for a world order involved a large degree of socialization and subordination of the individual will to the communal good, he was a strong advocate of the importance of developing the capacity of each individual to its utmost limits. In pursuit of this ideal of self-development he opposed many of the conventional restrictions of his day. He was very much interested in sex relationship and marriage, and his advocacy of free love placed him among advanced thinkers. The problem of the adjustment of the individual to his social environment was his chief interest, and if he was the opponent of class privilege, for the proletariat *en masse* he had little respect, and he had the strongest suspicions of the methods of contemporary democracy. His sympathy lay with the individual, for whom he had the warmest affection. These views, which gave him such immense influence in his day, are most fully expounded in his eminently readable prose treatises they also underlie, not only the poorer, over didactic novels of the 1912—1920 period, but also those mature works in which he shows himself a loveliest of very considerable understanding.”\* Wells was an optimist and he believed in the intelligence and disinterestedness of men promoted by education. He confidently believed that “practical applications of physical and economic science will give man a worldly habitation worthy of the possibilities of his nature.”\*\*

#### Conclusion.

“The future generations will undoubtedly appreciate his worth both as a great pioneer and as one of the most devoted servants in our history of the high destinies of humanity.”†

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**Q. 87. Give a brief account of the novels of Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) and write a note on his contribution to English fiction.**

**Ans.** Joseph Conrad was by birth a citizen of Poland, but later on he adopted England for his country. He picked up the English language with remarkable ease and wrote it with fluency

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\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

\*\* Moody-Lovett—A History of English Literature.

† J. B. Coats—Leaders of Modern Thought.

and poetic beauty. He was not concerned with the problems of social and economic life, but was principally interested in the presentation of his own rich experience of life in Malaya, Pacific islands, and exotic lands. Underlying all his novels the reader can detect a moral tone emphasising the necessity of practising the principle of *fidelity* in all human relationship.

His early novels *An Outcast of the Islands* and *Almayer's Folly* are rich in tropical background and are redolent of the tropical rivers and vegetation. *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) "is a moving story of life on ship, remarkable for its powerful atmosphere, its sea description, and its character study. Donkin is one of the best of his many vividly drawn villains and is a figure in Smollett's vein." It is a gruesome novel and the tragic intensity of the death of the negro touches us deeply. In 1900 Conrad produced his best novel *Lord Jim*. It was for the first time in this novel that Conrad adopted the oblique and indirect method of narration through the ironical Marlow, who also figures in his later novels. The novel emphasises the principle of fidelity and faithfulness in human life. Those who betray the trust reposed in them are never at ease and receive divine punishment. It is impressionistic in character and the story is a conglomeration of loosely scattered incidents revolving round the central character, Jim, the second officer on the ship 'Patna'. *Youth and Typhoon* (1902-3) are tales of sea life. *The Heart of Darkness* and *The End of Tether* provide vivid descriptions of eastern lands and take us in the heart of Malaya. *Nostromo* (1904) takes us to Africa, and *The Mirrors of the Sea* recounts the personal experiences of the novelist about the sea.

*The Secret Agent* (1907) is the story of the underworld of London and is impressionistic in character. *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is a tale of Russian life dealing with the activities of the Russian revolutionaries. The character of Razumov is finely portrayed and the general atmosphere in the novel is that of fear. *Chance* (1914) is loose in structure though it reveals Conrad's power as an artist. *An Iceland Tale* (1915), *Within the Tides* (1915) are sea novels repeating the old experiences of the novelist about the sea. *Rescue* (1920) and *The Rover* (1922) complete the record of the stirring tales of sea life and adventurous incidents.

narrated in a colourful manner.

As A Novelist.

### **The Theme Of Conrad's Novels—His Subjects.**

Conrad was interested in two subjects. He chose to make his own experiences of sea-life and tropical areas as the subject matter of his novels. The background of his novels is furnished by the sea and the luxuriant forests of Malaya. Another subject which kept Conrad engaged is the principle of fidelity and faith between man and man and the distracting power of evil in human life. These two themes make Conrad a Romanticist and a Moralist and both these strains run through his works.

### **As a Romanticist—The Laureate of Sea-life.**

Conrad was a Romanticist interested in the presentation of distant scenes in exotic lands. He was the laureate of sea life and the life of jungles. Instead of photographically presenting sea-life and the life of tropical areas with extreme realism, Conrad sought to *interpret* the sea-life and the life of forests, and through the colour of his imagination gave the *impression* of that life. "He was again like Hawthorne in portraying the effect that an object makes upon him who observes it. So he became a master of impressionism which is poles apart from realism."\*

### **As a Moralist—His Principle of Fidelity.**

As a moralist Conrad emphasised the principle of fidelity and faithfulness in human life. Betrayal of trust and deception of one's fellowmen seemed to him to be heinous sins to be condemned and deprecated in fierce language. The principle of fidelity is fully illustrated in three novels (1) *Under Western Eyes* (2) *Lord Jim* (3) *The Secret Sharer*. In the first novel Razumov betrays Haldin by handing him over to the police when he seeks shelter under his roof. Razumov violates the principle of fidelity and loyalty to Haldin and is a betrayer of trust. He deserves punishment. In *Lord Jim* Jim, the second officer on the ship '*Patna*' betrays the pilgrims by jumping from the ship for his own safety at a time when the ship of which he was incharge was on the verge of sinking. It was an act of betrayal of trust and Lord Jim felt qualms of conscience for the rest of his life till he could redeem his honour in another



enterprise in '*Malaya*' (ship).

**Conrad's technique of narration—The indirect method.**

In '*The Shadow Line*' Conrad adopted the traditional method of narration and told his story in a direct manner. But he soon gave up this direct method for the indirect or oblique method of narration, in which the events happening in the story are presented by a central character in backward forward manner building up a picture through a series of brief sense impressions, which only reveal their full significance when they finally come together in a complete whole. In *Lord Jim* it is Marlow who indirectly narrates the incidents happening on the *Patna* in a backward-forward manner. "In his indirect approach his subtlety of psychological analysis, and his high degree of intellect and artistry" says Dr. A. S. Collins, "Conrad invites comparison with the older novelist Henry James, whose friendship Conrad enjoyed and from whose example he may well have learned." For Conrad the novel was not a narration but a report.

**Conrad's Pessimism.**

An atmosphere of sombreness and pessimism broods over the novels of Joseph Conrad. In the battle with the mighty forces of Nature man proves feeble and at the end meets with disaster. "In the battle against Nature many fail and Conrad's interest as often with Browning, lies frequently in the failures in analysing the weakness of a man's character." Conrad presented the solitary life of his sea captains and harped upon their loneliness. *The End of the Tether* is the majestic epic of solitude representing the solitary life of Captain Whalley suffering the buffets of fortune and destiny all alone in a world of despair and mystery. Life in Conrad's novels is grim and gruesome, and sometimes the monstrous and uncouth works of Nature oppressing humanity appear to be extremely painful to the readers.

**Conrad's Characters.**

Conrad's characters are mostly drawn from the ranks of sailors, adventurers and explorers. He has also created villains like Kurtz and Donkin. His method of character portrayal is unique. He preserves objective detachment in creating his characters.

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## Novel From 1918 To 1966

**Q. 88.** Write a note on the main novels of D.H. Lawrence (1885—1930) and his contribution to the English Novel.

**Ans.** D. H. Lawrence was one of the most remarkable and striking figures in the literary world between the two wars. He was the novelist of sex life, physical passions, and animalism. In his *Sons and Lovers*, D. H. Lawrence enunciated his faith in physical life in the following words—"My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect." At another place Lawrence wrote, "I want men and women to be able to think sex fully, completely, honestly and cleanly." No other contemporary novelist was Lawrence's equal in communicating the sense of living things in a vivid and clear manner. "Much that he wrote is furious with a convulsive energy and fire, though his debating style sometimes veered towards the peevish shrillness of intellectual immaturity."\*

Lawrence's first novel was *The White Peacock* (1911). In this novel Lawrence presents the conflict between man and woman and sets out to prove that woman is a harpy bent upon the immasculation of man. *The Trespasser* (1912) further carries forward the attack on women. In *Sons and Lovers* (1913), which is considered an autobiographical novel, Lawrence presents with deep insight the relationship between son and mother. In *The Rainbow* (1915) the concentration is once again on sex, and the book was suppressed for sometime as it was considered obscene by the moralists of the time. The sequel to *The Rainbow* was *Women in Love*, in which he expounded with vehemence his views upon human life. In 1922 was published *Aaron's Rod* in which the Italian atmosphere is presented with vividness. From his personal experience of life in Australia which he visited

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\* A. G. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

Lawrence made out two novels *Kangaroo* (1923) and *The Boy in the Bush* (1924). In these two novels Lawrence depicted the Australian background with striking vividness. In *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) Lawrence concentrated his attention on Mexican life, and presented with the same vividness and intensity as he did the Australian life in *Kangaroo*. Here Lawrence exalted the values of primitive life and denounced the shams and artificialities of modern civilized society. In 1926 was published the much criticised book *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It is "a novel in which sexual experience is handled with a wealth of physical detail and uninhibited language which had caused its suppression in this country. It is Lawrence's last embittered fling at what he felt to be the purience of mind which sheltered behind the conventional notions of sex and he claimed that it was very truly moral." (Albert).

#### As A Novelist.

##### The novelist of sex and primitive instincts.

D. H. Lawrence was essentially the novelist of sex-life, and it was the avowed object of his life to glorify sex and primitive instincts in his works. In *Sons and Lovers* he clearly stated—"My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect." "Mr. Lawrence's work" says Gerald Bullet, "is saturated in sex, even when it happens to be devoid of sexual incident." His *White Peacock*, *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are novels of sex and two of them were suppressed for being obscene.

In Lawrence's novels it is the woman who has been castigated and attacked. In *Aaron's Rod* the views of Lawrence are clearly stated. He says:—

"Women are the hottest hell once they get the start of you. There's nothing they won't do to you once they have got you. Nothing they won't do to you, especially if they love you."

Lawrence was the novelist of instinct, sense and feeling. His stress was more on feelings, passions and instinct than on intellect, wit, or reason. "Scorning the mere intellectual faculties, he placed his trust in the experience of the senses, which for him seem to gain in value as they become more violent. Man's primitive instincts and the impulses which spring from his uncon-

scious mind are his safest guides in life."\* He was, in reality, the prophet of the primitive instincts and passions.

**As a critic of modern civilization.**

D. H. Lawrence was a critic of modern materialism and artificial conventions of our sophisticated society. He sought escape from money-mindedness of modern civilized people and the ugliness of modern life in the beautiful and healthy instinctive life of the people of Mexico and Australia.

**Novelist of un-conscious life.**

Lawrence sought to bring "to light those unconscious elements in man's nature which were far more influential agents than superficial consciousness. The task that faced him was that of devising a language in which the unconscious could be expressed. The language he found in metaphor and symbol, and, although his way to success was not without adventures, he succeeded beyond any writer of his time in giving the unconscious adequate and powerful voice."\*\*

**Lawrence's technique and method of treatment.**

Lawrence was not very much interested in the story and cogent plot construction. All that he attempted was to treat his theme in an impassioned manner, imparting to it all the vitality, vigour and force of which he was capable. "No other contemporary novelist was Lawrence's equal in communicating an extraordinarily vivid sense of living things and beings."

**Lawrence's characters.**

His finest characters are those in whom he projects his own personality and views about life. Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, R. L. Somers in *Kangaroo* and Birkin in *Women in Love* are mouth-pieces of Lawrence and it can be safely said that they are his finest characters. These characters have striking similarities with their creator. "They share his bitterness and darkness of spirit, and like him they live passionately and fully. They are creatures of strong impulse and primitive emotions, and they are studied with a remarkable depth of understanding and keenness of insight."†

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

† E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

**His Style.**

Lawrence's style is vigorous and forceful. His descriptive power is seen at its best in *The Boy in The Bush*. If we judge Lawrence, "by the standards of the meticulous artist with finely attuned ear and an eye for accuracy of detail and grammar, we shall often find him lacking." Often he wearies us by the repetition of the same thought in almost a similar language. He adopts the trick of "telling us the same thing and harping on the same words over and over again."\*

**Conclusion.**

"Lawrence was a barbarian with a streak of genius." "Lawrence was the only novelist of his time to use the novel for the purpose of re-creating the great myths by which humanity lives, and he did it with a burning intensity and sincerity. When all is said there is greatness in him. He is something of an authentic visionary, and the future may be in a better position to interpret his dreams."\*\*

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**Q. 89. Write a note on the works and contribution of J. B. Priestley (1894—), Frank Swinnerton (1884—), and Sir Hugh Walpole (1884—1941) to the modern novel.**

**Ans. J. B. Priestley (1884—)**

J. B. Priestley, the critic who wrote a treatise on the English Novel, is himself a novelist of the second order. He shot into fame by *The Good Companion* (1929), a long story of the adventures of a touring concert party. Later on Priestley brought out *Angel Pavement* (1930), *Let the People Sing* (1939), *Daylight on Saturday* (1943), *Bright Day* (1946). In all these novels Priestley represents life realistically with fine wit and liveliness. His style is appealing to the readers. Besides being a novelist, Priestley also signalised his career as a critic and wrote fine critical studies such as *George Meredith* (1926), *The English Comic Characters* (1926), *Thomas Love Peacock* (1927), *The English Novel* (1927) and *English Humour* (1928).

**Frank Swinnerton (1884—)**

Swinnerton, the critic, who wrote *The Georgian Literary*

\* Gerald Bullett : Modern English Fiction.

\*\* Diana Neill : A Short History of the English Novel.

*Scene and George Gissing* is known by his single work in fiction *Nocturne*. He is a realist and belongs to the school of Gissing. "The result was a solid circumstantial realism lighted up by considerable penetration but no unusual flights of imagination."

**Hugh Walpole (1884—1941)**

Hugh Walpole produced a number of novels during his life time, the chief of them being *The Wooden Horse* (1909), *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* (1911), *Prelude to Adventure* (1912), *The Dark Forest* (1916), *The Cathedral* (1922), *The Old Ladies* (1924), *Portrait of a Man With Red Hair* (1925) and *The Herries Chronicle* (1939).

Walpole believed in the principle of 'Art for Art's sake', and instead of dealing with social problems in his novels like H. G. Wells and Galsworthy, he wrote for the pleasure of creation and beauty. He had a particular liking for religious life, and the life of the Cathedrals and his novels are rich in reflections about God and His power over human beings. Walpole loved Nature and his novels are remarkable for descriptions of nature's charms. He described nature's beauties with vividness. He had a knack of portraying characters and excelled in the creation of male characters in whom he presented his faith in religion and God. His style is marked with suspense, animation and ease.

His main defects are (1) Lack of humour (2) Over seriousness (3) Occasional lapses into loose episodes.

**Q. 90. Write a note on the novels and achievements of Somerset Maugham (1874—).**

**Ans.** Somerset Maugham is one of the prominent literary figures of the 20th century. He is a novelist, a dramatist and a writer of short stories. As a dramatist, Maugham followed the tradition of the writers of the Restoration Comedy and produced comedies scintillating with wit and humour. *Lady Fredrick* is one of his finest satirical comedies exposing the evils running rampant in the upper classes of society.

In the world of fiction, Maugham is known by a set of novels which have been classified under three groups. In the first group we include immature novels such as *Mrs. Craddock*,

*The Magician, Ashenden and Catalina.* In the second group we place novels like *The Painted Veil, The Narrow Corner, Theatre, Christmas Holiday, Up at the Villa* and *Liza of Lambeth*. The novels of this group are marked with a note of realism and exhibit, "a more intense and passionate awareness of life in which the accents of the novelist are already grim and dead earnest." In the third group are included his philosophical thought-provoking works such as *Of Human Bondage, The Moon and Six Pens, Cakes and Ale* and *The Razor's Edge*.

Let us briefly review these novels of Maugham. *Mrs. Craddock* is the story of a woman deserted by her husband in the wrinkled phase of her life. The novel is marked with a note of sadness and gloominess. *The Magician* is written in the style and manner of Henry Rider Haggard. In this novel magic operates fully and the dead are called back to life. An atmosphere of weirdness and uncanniness envelops the entire novel. *Ashenden* and *Catalina* are immature productions. In *Ashenden* he projects his own experiences of the war. Ashenden is the British agent who is after an Indian named Chandra Lal. *Catalina* is concerned with the miracles of Christian saints during the Middle Ages and the scene of this rambling tale is mediaeval Spain. The author emphasises that "the best way to serve God is not fasting and penance nor fighting for the holy cause in foreign lands, but to do one's duty in one's humble sphere of life." *The Painted Veil* is a Chinese tale representing the amorous intrigues of a doctor's wife with a colonial officer. *The Narrow Corner* is a study of the Southern seas and exotic scenes where people are governed by wild passions and fierce emotions. *Theatre* represents the life of an actress who keeps up the fire of youth even in her senile decay. *Christmas Holiday* is the story of a Parisian prostitute Lydia who renounces all her pleasures and wealth in order to save the life of her husband undergoing life sentence on the charge of murder. *Up at the Villa* is a crude, melodramatic tale replete with passion and wild adventure set in Florence. *Liza of Lambeth* is a realistic novel depicting the life of Liza, a factory girl, who meets her tragic death tossed about on the waves of passion. The novel is marked with a note of sadness and the death of Liza seems to be arbitrarily imposed. "The novel

is written with a brutal, harsh realism and the various scenes with which the novel teems are convincing and overbrimming with verisimilitude." *Of Human Bondage* has been considered the best work of Maugham. Theodore Dreiser regards it "at a novel of the utmost importance." In the opinion of Charles Hanson Towne, "*Of Human Bondage* is one of the classics of our time. A monumental novel. A deep, rich, penetrating book packed with beauty." In the view of Godfrey Winn this novel is "not only Maugham's best work but also one of the few books written during the present century to the epithet *great* can be truly applied." In this novel the novelist represents the life of Philip Carey, the isolated man with his club-foot. The novel sets out to give a full account of Carey's childhood, upbringing, education and love. The loneliness of his life is hinted from the start when Philip's mother dies. The total effect of the novel is depressing. Such words as the following uttered by Carey seem to be cynical—

"Life had no meaning. It was immaterial whether he was born or not born, whether he lived or ceased to live. Life was insignificant and death without consequence."

*The Moon and Six Pence* is the life story of Gaugin, a French painter, who runs away from human society and civilization to find relief and refuge in a tropical island. The novel represents the renunciation of the material values of life for peace and perfection of the soul. *Cakes and Ale* is an interesting, witty and satirical novel representing the life of Mr. Driffield, the novelist and his Bohemian and luxurious wife Rosie who is a full-blooded woman intent upon making the most of life. "As a witty, malicious, satirical comedy it is bound to survive as a most entertaining footnote to twentieth century literary history."\* *The Razor's Edge* is a philosophic novel representing Maugham's attitude towards life and his faith in renunciation. Larry is the hero of this novel. He comes to India and meets with Indian sadhus and philosophers from whom he imbibes the lesson of renunciation.

Maugham belongs to the group of the second grade novelists of our time. He is considerably influenced by the French

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\* Walter Allen : The English Novel.



novelists. He is a cosmopolitan author interested not only in his own country but also in Italy, France, India and South seas. He represents fine scenes of nature and human society in these countries.

Maugham is interested in three problems—the problem of renunciation and materialistic craze for possession, the problem of love and the problem of the futility and meaninglessness of human life. In his view renunciation of the world is the ultimate solution of all our materialistic worries of life. In *Love*, Maugham seeks to present the tragedy of love. Love does not come out in shining and successful form in his novels. Everywhere we come across the tragedy of love. Life seems to Maugham ‘as a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.’ *Of Human Bondage* is his final judgment on the meaninglessness and loneliness of human life.

Turning to the technical side of his art, it may be pointed out that his novels are narratives recounting experiences in detail in a rambling manner. He tells his stories in a “chatty, informal and intimate tone. His narrative is often loose and disjointed. It meanders up and down in a leisurely fashion.”

The characters of Maugham fail to exercise a permanent hold on us. They are drawn with insight but there is the lack of fervour and vigour in their portrayal. We hardly remember his Liza, Carey, Larry, Gaugin and Rosie, as we remember Micawber, Mr. Pickwick, Beckysharp, Tess, Henchard and Soames Forsyte.

The style of Maugham is cold, matter-of-fact and realistic. It is all skin and bone. His descriptive vein adds to the charm of his style. The dialogue is supple and dramatic. He does not bother about the finer delicacies of style and in *A Writer's Note-Book* he makes the frank confession—“It proves that if you can tell stories, create character, devise incidents, and if you have sincerity and passion, it does not matter at all how you write.”

Maugham has one great virtue. He makes us *think* about Life and Love. He gives jerks to our self complacent ideologies, and forces us to view life in a philosophic way. He convinces us that, “art, unless it leads to right action is no more than the

opium of the intelligentsia.”

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**Q. 91.** Give a brief account of the main works of Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) and bring out the chief features of his art as a Novelist.

**Ans.** Aldous Huxley, the grandson of Thomas Huxley, the scientist of the Darwinian School, is one of the most subtle and intellectual of modern writers. He was an author of repute and his works present satirically the disillusionment in social life. He died on 23rd November 1963. His main works are the following.

*Crome Yellow* (1921), the first novel of Huxley “is something of a youthful fire-work display.” It is concerned with the Wimbush family, and its young hero Dennis is another Hamlet in whom reflection mars his capacity for action. It is light hearted in its raillery. *Antic Hay* (1923) is sombre in outlook and has little of the raillery of *Crome Yellow*. It is a critical study of post-war disillusionment and immorality. Through the character of Gumbriel the novelist brings out the ugliness and tenuity of the intellectual society of London after the first world war. *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) is set in Italy and studies the acquisitive nature of women through the character of Mrs. Aldwinkle. This novel is marked with diffuseness and is sprawling in character. *Point Counter Point* (1928) is a serious novel representing the conflict between passion and reason, and the foolishness of sticking to only one point of view with dogged tenacity without ever caring to look at the other side of the medal. Rampion provides the solution by pointing out to different protagonists of sense, intellect and reason that, “civilization is harmony and completeness —reason, feeling and instinct.” This novel adopts a special technique described as “the musicalization of fiction.” It is rich in witty and satirical epigrams. In *The Brave New World* (1932) Huxley satirises a scientific utopia in which everything is controlled by science, and even mind, body, poetry, art and literature are all conditioned by the steamroller of scientific uniformity. The severe critic of this controlled world is the savage John who pleads for greater freedom of the individual and spiritual life, though he fails to persuade the inhabitants of this scientific world to live up to his ideal of free spiritual life.

The new-found respect for the spirit is best represented in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936). It is a work of mysticism and spirituality. The hero of the novel is Antony Beavis. In the early years of his life, he is intelligent, witty, pagan, flippant and a satirist of vigour and verve. He is responsible for the death of his friend whose sincere and emotional nature is not understood by him. But gradually as time passes on, Antony Beavis realises his mistakes. He drifts more and more towards spiritual life. He experiences the kind of conversion which Huxley has experienced in the latter years of his life.

Two non-fictional works, *Ends and Means* (1938) and *Grey Eminence* (1941) are philosophic and political in outlook. In *Ends and Means* we have essays on a number of political, educational and religious subjects. Huxley stands out as a pacifist standing against militarism and armament. In *Grey Eminence*, he makes a brilliant study of the relationship between religion and politics. Friar Josef, the counsellor of Cardinal Richelieu, seeks to spread religion through political agencies. He keeps spies in his service. He proves a false teacher. Huxley wishes to draw the conclusion that right religious ends cannot be secured through the machinery of political power.

In two recent novels *After Many a Summer* (1939), *Time Must Have a Stop*, Huxley mocks at the corrupting influence of wealth in the new world. *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946) is a philosophical work inspired by the message of Bhagwat Gita. Failure to persuade humanity to follow him along the path of non-attachment and unity provoked Huxley to write *Ape and Essence* (1949), "a bitter novel in which he predicts the bestial degradation of the human species after a third world war."\*

As a novelist Huxley has employed the medium of the novel for purposes of discussion and propagation of his views. It is not the story or the plot that is important in Huxley. His plots are formless, sprawling and diffused. What is significant in his works is the treatment of his subject in a brilliant manner.

Huxley's novels are satirical in tone. They are marked with force and vigour. His best work in this direction is *The Brave New World* in which he satirises the mechanical and controlled

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\* Diana Neill : A History of the English Novel.

life brought about by science.

Huxley has a philosophical message to impart through the medium of his novel. In *Point-Counter-Point* the novelist lays emphasis on synthesis and harmony between sense and reason. In *Eyeless in Gaza* we have the message of non attachment carried forward in his *Perennial Philosophy*.

Huxley does not mortify the flesh. He lays emphasis on the determination of the spirit by the body. He says, "Sooner or later every soul is stifled by the sick body, sooner or later there are no more thoughts but only pain and vomiting and stupor. The spirit has no significance, there is only the body."

Huxley's style in his novels is witty and polished. He is an intellectual writer and naturally his prose is marked with intellectual qualities like reason, analysis and searching inquiry.

Huxley will go down as a thought provoking and stirring writer of our times.

**Q. 92. Write a note on E. M. Forster's novels and his contribution to English fiction.**

**Ans.** E. M. Forster (1879—) is one of the prominent novelists of the 20th century. "As a novelist Forster is rather difficult to understand him partly because of the symbolism that works its way through his work, and partly because of the manner in which he seeks to impart his message. As a novelist he is often delightful and always baffling and ambiguous and he has always stood apart from his contemporaries."\*

Forster began his career as a novelist at the early age of twenty five and produced his first novel *Where Angels Fear To Tread* in (1905). This novel is satirical in character and the author satirises the conventional morality and snobbery of the upper middle class people typified in the character of Mrs. Herriton. This aristocratic lady fails to understand the overpowering force of emotion and love, and strives to break the love of her widowed daughter-in-law Lilia with the vulgar Italian Gino,

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\* Walter Allen : The English Novel.

with no success. The novelist ridicules the insular ideas and provincial morality of the Sawstons represented by Mrs. Herrington. Fools like Mrs. Herrington and Harriets rush in 'Where angels fear to tread' This is the underlying irony of the novel.

*The Longest Journey* was published in 1907. Here again there is the conflict between convention and nature. Rickie Eliot is the Shelleyian idealist. He is opposed to convention. Unfortunately he is wedded to Agnes Pembroke, who represents the world of sordid values. A conflict grows between Rickie and Agnes. He is rescued from his despair by Stephen, his half brother. Just before the novel reaches the end of *the long journey* Rickie knows for certain that "conventions are not majestic, and that they will not claim us in the end."

*A Room with a View* (1908) has its setting in Italy and is marked with an exhilarating comic tone. "In scale and in tone it is smaller and lighter than *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Its manner is airier. It takes more colour from the outdoors and more charm from human absurdity, and the quality of its comedy is more romantic. The comedy is also shot through with a sense of melodramatic evil which, though not so violently expressed as that of the first Italian comedy, is more frightening in its gratuitousness and its restraint."\*

*Howard's End* (1910) presents the conflict between two classes of people, one representing the hard boiled realists and materialists represented by the Wilcoxes and the other deeply rooted in moral and aesthetic values represented by Schlegels. Forster seeks to save the Wilcoxes by their marriage with the Schlegels. A truly balanced view is possible when there is the marriage of a Wilcox with a Schlegel. This is the symbolic meaning of the marriage between Margaret Schlegel and the senior Wilcox. Through this marriage Margaret will gain the "Howard's End," the house, which symbolises the heart of England and which mystically holds the secret of true personal relationship.

*A Passage to India* (1924) is considered the finest and best work of Forster. It is "unrivalled in English fiction in its presentation of the complex problems which were to be found in the relationships between English and the native people in India, and

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\* Trilling : E. M. Forster.

in its portrayal of the Indian scene in all its magic and all its wretchedness.”\* The novel seeks to portray the relations of the British with the Indians round about the year 1924. Forster seeks to bring about a reconciliation between the East and the West, but fails at the end.

The novel is mystical as well as symbolic in character. “In *A Passage to India* Forster’s intent is to present not only Western civilization in collision with eastern, imperial with colonial, the human heart in conflict with the machinery of government, class, and race, but also a mystical and highly symbolic view of life, death and human relationship. That he does not succeed entirely is not surprising in view of the great expanse of the canvas.”\*\*

The novel is divided in three parts—“Mosques”, “Caves” & “Temple”. This three folds division of the book is symbolic in character. They are related respectively to the seasons of spring, summer and the wet monsoon autumn of India, and to man’s emotional nature, his intellect and his capacity for love. The characters of this novel seek to represent these three attitudes towards life. Dr. Aziz stands for emotion; Fielding and Adela Quested stand for intellect, and the Hindu Professor Godbole is the symbol of love. Mrs. Moore is the embodiment of all these three aspects of life. With her impulse towards emotion and her involvement in things of the intellect, she seems equally at home in mosques, caves or temples. Forster represents through these characters the three ways of leading life. It is the novelist’s aim to weld these diverse paths together through delicate use of symbolic motifs so that they form a total satisfying, if mystifying pattern of life and art.

“America hailed the novel as an indictment of British rule, while in England the witty satire at the expense of the English official class in India ensured that the book would be popular with the intelligentsia. Forster was, incidentally, to show an almost prophetic insight into the future in the scene with which

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\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

\*\* Fredrick Karl & Marvin Magalaner—A Reader’s Guide to Great Twentieth Century English Novels.

the book ends.”\*

### As A Novelist.

Walter Allen is of the opinion that “Forster is a novelist difficult to assess : he can be as easily overestimated as underestimated”, and we thoroughly agree with this view. To some readers Forster appeals intensely, while others are bored by his representation of life.

### Plot Construction.

The plots of Forster are intricate and difficult to follow. He “disregards conventional plot construction and frequently introduces startling, unexpected incidents.”\*\*

### Characterisation.

The characters of Forster are types rather than individuals. They are the embodiment of certain values of life. His characters can be divided into two groups, the ‘Crustaceans’ and the ‘Vitalists.’ The former are followers of conventions while the latter are men of feeling and deep devotion. To the class of Crustaceans belong Ronnie Heaslop, Charlotte Eliot, Major Callender and the Turtons. The Vitalists are Fielding. Mrs. Moore and George Emerson. The Wilcoxes of *Howard’s End* belong to the class of Crustaceans while the Schlegels have their affinity with the Vitalists.

In Forster’s characters whether male or female there is “a lack of passion and sexual fulfilment. A religiosity colours Forster’s major characters. Phillip Herriton’s vision makes of Caroline Abbot a goddess. Phillip’s worship of her in (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*) is more a self-denying asceticism reminding us of the Celibate’s love of the virgin Mother.”†

There is a detachment in the character portrayal of Forster. The novelist paints his characters with impartiality keeping himself as a bystander. “He does not identify himself exclusively with any one character, but stands a little aloof, a sympathetic spectator who from time to time leans forward to get a more intimate view of that.”††

\* Daina Neill—A Short History of the English Novel.

\*\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

† James Miconkey—The Novels of E. M. Forster.

†† Gerald Bullett—Modern English Fiction.

**As a Realist—His attack on Realism.**

Forster has been considered by some critics as a Realist, but the fact is that he takes greater delight in attacking realism than in applauding it. "The surface manner of Forster's novels may appear to be realistic and comic but his impatience with realism is apparent in the manner he infused sudden act of violence and accidents in his plots and in his wilful juxtaposition of a romantic figure in a realistic environment as in *The Longest Journey* or a realistic figure in a romantic environment as in *A Room With a View*."\* His *Passage to India* though presenting realistically the Anglo-Indian relations is more philosophical and symbolical than a realistic representation of the racial antagonism between "two great races with different heritage and history; neither desiring to understand the other, and one of them in the wrong place."

**As a Moralist.**

As a moralist, Forster is opposed to convention, money worship, hypocrisy, snobbery and prim affected manners. He is against all shams, cant and falsehood. He pleads fervently for the adoption of sincerity, and truthfulness in human relations. In the *Howard's End* his sympathies are with the Shelegels rather than with the Wilcoxes, and in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, he is evidently with Gino rather than with the affected Mrs. Herriton and Miss Harriet. Forster is basically a moralist upholding the cause of culture, tolerance and civilization in a world open to the attacks of barbarism, materialism and provincialism.

**As a Critic of Contemporary Civilization.**

D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster are critics of modern civilization reared on material values of life. Forster attacks materialism in *The Longest Journey* and *Howard's End*. "Not only did Forster and Lawrence share this general reaction against contemporary civilization, but they had a common positive theme, for the novels of both are really exercises on the motif of right personal relationships, a favourite phrase of Forster's."\*\* Forster relied on heart and culture as an antidote against modern materialism, while Lawrence "relied primarily on the passion of

\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Dr A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.



the blood and was preoccupied with sexuality, a theme almost alien to Forster."

#### As a Symbolist.

E. M. Forster is a symbolist, and what could not be expressed adequately through words is suggested by Forster through symbols. In *The Longest Journey*, Forster employs the symbol of the Train. Rickie, the hero is struck by a train in his attempt to save the drunken Stephen. The death of Rickie by the train is symbolic, for it stands for the salvation of Stephen. Then comes another train in which Herbert Pembroke is seen to be moving about but fading out of sight. This presents the passing away of evil figures like Herbert Pembroke from our life. In *Howard's End* motor car is the symbol of the rush and recklessness of modern fast moving civilization. The motor car becomes for Forster a symbolic indictment of our civilization of rattle and bustle. In *A Passage to India*, the symbolism is represented in the very title. "Passage" is symbolic of 'link' or 'conception', and by giving the title *A Passage to India* the author advocates for link or conception between the Anglo-Indians and the natives of India. The threefold division of the book 'Mosque', 'Caves' and 'Temple' is symbolic. It stands for the seasons of spring, summer and wet autumn monsoon of India. Referring to man's nature, the division is symbolically significant. Mosque stands for man's emotional nature, caves for his intellect and temple for his devotion and love. Dr. Aziz is the symbol of emotion, Fielding and Adela Quested stand for the symbol of intellect and professor Godbole is the symbol of love and devotion. Glen O, Allen finds in the threefold division of the novel three attitudes towards life: the path of activity (Dr. Aziz), the path of knowledge (Fielding) and the path of devotion (Godbole). The echo which Mrs. Moore hears in one of the Marabar caves suggests the empty absolute.

#### As a Comedian—His art.

Forster's novels, inspite of their tragic ending, leave the impression that their author is a comedian using the *comic spirit* of Meredith in the service of his art. He judges and criticises with an ironical verve, and lashes like Meredith the snobbery and

hypocrisy of the age—all the time mocking at them like a true comedian.

#### **Lyrical Sensibility.**

“Not that there is any question of Forster being only a comedian. Blended with his comic vein, and equally characteristic of him, is his poetry. He has an acute lyrical sensibility”  
(Cecil).

#### **Forster's Style.**

Like all the best styles, Forster's style is an exact mirror of his mind and temperament. We may not call his style grand for it lacks eloquence and burning passion, but “it is infinitely sensitive, infinitely dexterous, infinitely graceful.” The reader will come across many luminous and sensitive passages in his novels.

After reading one of his packed, live, iridescent pages, the work of most other authors seems obvious and monotonous. Every inch of surface is continuously animated by the play of mind. Hardly a sentence but gives us a little shock of surprise and interest. Each novel delights, for all the diverse elements are fused together in charming harmony by Forster's use of language.

#### **His Place in Modern Fiction.**

Arnold Kettle is of the view that “E. M. Forster is not a writer of the stature of D. H. Lawrence or James Joyce, but he is a fine and enduring artist and the only living British novelist who can be discussed without fatuity, against the highest and the broadest standards.” Forster will rank high among 20th century novelists.

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**Q. 93.** Give a brief account of the main works of James Joyce (1882—1941) and assess the value of his contribution to the English Novel.

**Ans.** James Joyce is one of the prominent literary figures of the 20th century. He was the main exponent of the psychological novel based on the representation of the stream of consciousness, and his *Ulysses* is the finest example of the subjective method in modern fiction. In Joyce, “the twentieth century

passion for experiment in literary form reached its climax.”\*

Joyce's early experiment in literary production was in the direction of writing short stories published in a volume called *Dubliners* (1914). The stories of this volume bring to light the life of the slum dwellers of this city. The stories are objective and realistic in character and are couched in a simple and direct style. Another important work of Joyce is *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). It is an autobiographical work and the artist Dedalus is the representative of the novelist in whom there was a conflict between the forces of asceticism and aestheticism. “As a revelation of Joyce's power to explore the psychology of his own nature with detachment and scientific curiosity, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is unparalleled in a period rich in self-analysis. Pride and sensuality struggle for the possession of the soul of Stephen Dedalus, who, having rejected the help of religion, seeks to escape into tranquillity through the impersonality of art.”\*\*

*Ulysses* (1922) is considered the best work in psychological fiction of the 20th century and the stream-of-consciousness theory finds its best exposition in this novel. The novel is set in Dublin and seeks to represent Dublin life in all its gruesome realism. The novel sets forth in a rambling manner the wanderings of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus through the city of Dublin on one particular day. The novel is extremely formless, loose and incoherent outdoing the work of Smollett and Sterne of the eighteenth century. Bullett considers it as “the *reductio ad absurdum* of the extreme subjective method.” Diana Neill says rightly that “the book is unintelligible and its formal complexities have left readers baffled and confused.” The style of this book is marked with ingenuity, witticism and satirical flashes.

Joyce's only other work of importance is *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) where “subtlety and complexity produce incomprehensibility. It is a study of the history of the human race from its earliest beginnings, as seen in the incoherent dreams of a certain Mr. Earwicker. The use of an inconsecutive narrative and of a

\* Diana Neill : A Short History of the English Novel.

\*\* Ibid.

private vocabulary adds to the confusion, but it cannot conceal the poetic fervour, the power and brilliant verbal skill of the work.”\*

#### As a Novelist.

James Joyce belongs to the group of psychological-cum-realistic novelists of the 20th century. His *Ulysses* is the perfect example of the impressionistic method which had earlier been tried by Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. His novels are formless, incoherent and rambling in character and provide fleeting glimpses of the life of Dublin which he knew so intimately. In *Ulysses*, his love for psychology and realism comes to the forefront. The study of the novel brings the complete picture of Dublin life on a particular day. “Acutely aware of the pettiness and meanness of modern society, and of the evils which spring from it, he is unsurpassed in his knowledge of the seamy side of life, which he presents with startling frankness.”

“Joyce” says Albert, “is a serious novelist, whose concern is chiefly with human relationships—man in relation to himself, to society and to the whole human race.”

Joyce is a comedy writer and his novels are rich in scenes of playful comedy. The scene in which Leopold Bloom is with the medical students in *Ulysses* is a fine comic scene. On the whole, “his genius is for the comic rather than the tragic view of life, and his work is full of wit, puns, and startling conceits. His humour varies from broad comedy to intellectual wit, but is mainly sardonic in tone.” Walter Allen, in the *English Novel* significantly points out, “The first thing that needs stressing, it seems to me, is that, whatever he is not, Joyce is a great comic writer, a comic writer of the quality of Rabelais and Sterne. In *Ulysses* Joyce, more than Fielding ever did, is writing the comic epic.”

As a technician in the realism of fiction, Joyce will hold a place as great as enjoyed by Henry James. “He was a ceaseless experimenter, ever anxious to explore the potentialities of a method once it was evolved and in his use of the stream of consciousness technique, and in his handling of the internal monologue, he went further and deeper than any other novelist.”\*\*

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\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

\*\* Ibid.

Joyce's style is marked with directness and simplicity in *Dubliners*. In his later works his style undergoes a change and drifts to the side of complexity, subtlety and allusiveness. A new vocabulary is invented by breaking up one word and joining it to other words similarly split. Roots of words coming from many languages are employed in the service of his style. In short, Joyce's mastery of language, his range of vocabulary, his power, to create words and to use them to render the impact of sensation on the nerves, and above all his unique virtuosity are everywhere manifested."\*

**Q. 94. Write a note on the main Women Novelist of the 20th Century.**

**Ans.** Round about the year 1930 women novelists dominated the literary scene. They followed in the footsteps of Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen and George Eliot. They represented the feminine point of view in their works. The prominent women novelists of the 20th century are Henry Handel Richardson, Dorothy Richardson, Miss Humphrey Ward, Sarah Grand, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton Burnett, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Let us briefly examine the works of these novelists.

**Henry Handel Richardson.**

Like George Eliot, Henrietta Richardson brought out her novels under the pseudonym of Henry Handel Richard. She is interested in Australian life and her works are marked with a note of masculinity and vigour surprising in a woman writer. Her main works are *Maurice Guest* (1908), *Young Cosima* (1939) and *The Fortunes of Richard Mobony* (1917—1929), a trilogy representing the study of the misadventures of the physician hero in Australia.

**Dorothy Richardson.**

She belongs to the school of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. She has made experiments in the fields of psychological analysis and has achieved success in her work.

**Her main works are *Pointed Roofs* (1915) and *Pilgrimage***

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\* Diana Neill : A Short History of the English Novel.

(1917). In these works she presents the feminine point of view, and no woman has succeeded so well in presenting feminine psychology as does Miss Richardson, in her two works.

**Miss Humphrey Ward.**

She is an intellectual novelist, and her work is marked with a note of seriousness and earnestness. There is a streak of religious and philosophical wisdom in her famous work, *The History of David Grieve*. Her *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella* are saturated with religious and philosophical thought. It is difficult to think of any other serious novelist since George Eliot.

**Sarah Grand.**

She is a great advocate of the 'women movement,' and has consistently worked for the emancipation of women in her novels. Her two chief novels are *Idela* and *The Woman Who Did*. In the art of narration and in the faculty of presenting a large number of characters in interaction with each other, Sarah Grand has given her best in *Adam's Orchard*. She is a novelist of strong intellectual force, and her characters have been vividly drawn. She is immensely appreciated by women readers.

**Elizabeth Bowen and Ivy Compton-Burnett.**

Their works have been discussed in the next question.

**Rose Macaulay.**

Rose Macaulay is a vigorous satirist and in *The Orphan Island* she presents a satirical portrait of Victorian society. Her two novels *Dangerous Ages* and *Told by an Idiot* are in the same style exposing the foibles of the Victorian age. To them Rose added her significant work *Potterism* which is written against Victorian philistinism.

*They Were Defeated* is a historical novel and recreates the life of the seventeenth century society with fidelity. *The World My Wilderness* (1950) is inspired by the war. "The characters of Barbary and Raove are drawn with sympathy and understanding, and the wilderness of the bomb desolated area around St. Paul's Cathedral is so accurately and vividly projected that future social historians may well find in this novel something more than a word-portrait of the city in ruins."\*

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

**Mrs. Clifford.**

She is the novelist of the heart and indulges in sentimentalism quite in the style of Richardson and Steele. Her well known work is *Aunt Anne*. In this novel she portrays the life of a foolish lady who had been duped by a young man, who, while professing to be her ardent and sincere lover, was befooling her all her life in the hope that after marriage he would become the master of her wealth.

**Katherine Mansfield (1888—1923).**

Katherine Mansfield is a writer of short stories and during her life time five volumes of her stories were published. As a writer of stories, she followed in the footsteps of the Russian novelist and short story writer Chekov, whose work she admired inordinately. She was an impressionist in her art and sought to portray with objectivity "the significant moment in human relationship, the curious and subtle spiritual adventure and the poignant ironies of contrasting human emotions." Unlike Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, who are exclusively autobiographical, Katherine Mansfield studied life objectively and 'understood characters widely divergent from herself in both temperaments and accidentals'. Some of her stories have the setting of Newzealand life, while in others she presents the weariness and frustrations of her English life. Her stories are marked with a note of sombreness and are characterised with a haunting sense of pathos. One should turn to *Prelude, To the Bay, The Fly, The Garden Party* to have glimpses of the subtle psychological art of Katherine Mansfield. Commenting on her work as a story writer Moody-Lovett observe, "From the first, she exhibited an astonishing assurance in technique and in control of her subject matter. Her touch was unerring. By the suppression of non-essentials and the unfaltering selection of telling details, she built up to the intensification of a single emotion, mood or psychological situation. Her growth was in the direction not of a more perfectly expressive technique, but of intensity of feeling and maturity of vision. She progressed from a rather jaundiced and smug view of people to one of pity and piercing sympathy. From a rather broad and sometimes crude satirist, she developed into a master of irony. Her depth of feeling and subtlety of insight,

together with her delicately sensitive prose, imparted a poetic lyricism to subjects that otherwise might have seemed sentimental or mawkish. She always wielded the gleaming blade of irony. She was at her best in the delineation of young children, adolescent girls and old women, perhaps because the experiences and observations of her own adult life were too close to her to view in perspective."

**Virginia Woolf (1882—1941).**

Virginia Woolf was the daughter of the eminent Victorian critic and scholar Sir Leslie Stephen, and was one of the great women writers of the 20th century.

She occupies a position of importance in 20th century fiction for she gave to the stream of consciousness novel a new twist which James Joyce had not been able to impart to it. Before we deal with the contribution of Virginia Woolf to fiction, let us briefly examine her works.

The first novel of significance published by Virginia Woolf was *The Voyage Out* (1915) followed by *Night and Day* (1919). In these works she made a subtle study of the inner lives of men and women. These first fruits of her genius are remarkable for the mysterious intensity with which she brought out the souls of her characters like Rachel Vinrace and Katherine Hilbery. *Jacob's Room* (1922) exhibits a fuller advance into maturity. "It is the first novel in which her personal vision of the flowing nature of all experience is given full and complete expression." The novel sets forth the impression of Jacob Flanders about his own life as a student at Cambridge, as a young man in love and as a soldier in war. Though the flowing nature of consciousness and the reality of the life of the spirit are nicely brought out in *Jacob's Room*, yet the novel suffers from lack of unity and cogency of impression. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) exhibits a further advance in her art of suggesting impressions in a loose and scattered manner. There is no attempt at organized story-telling in this novel. All that we have is "a most carefully selected and fully harmonized picture of life in London on one summer's day in 1919." The impressions of Mrs. Dalloway are represented lyrically in this novel though in her musings there is a streak of sadness. The book opens with Mrs. Dalloway going out to buy flowers for a



party and closes with a description of the party, but within these limits a most complex and fascinating pattern of human experience is woven. It is composed of the day dreams, memories, and immediate impressions of this central character, enriched by transitions into the consciousness of other characters who are connected with Mrs. Dalloway in some emotional or even merely passing relationship."

Mrs. Dalloway was followed by *To the Light House* which is considered as the best novel of the celebrated artist. This novel is divided into three parts. Part I "The Windows" Part II "Time Passes" Part III "The Light House." The experiences of professor Ramsay and his wife on a holiday are presented graphically. "Mrs Ramsay is seen not merely as the selfless centre of her own existence, but as the focus of concentric series of existences or less intimately involved with her." *The Waves* (1931) represents the technique of the flow of consciousness and inner thought in a heightened tone and is a high water mark of Mrs. Woolf's experimentation. "Concerned from the beginning with the nature of personality and convinced of its fluid formlessness, she suggested here that personality has no existence apart from the society in which it develops, that the so called individual existence is really no more than a facet of the existence of a group. She illustrated this conception of personality in *The Waves* by presenting the lives of a closely knit group of seven characters in a series of poetically stylized dialogues or interior monologues. The basic unity under the appearance of diversity is emphasized by the fact that all the characters express themselves in the same style, a highly imagistic, deeply rhythmical utterance that is constantly on the verge of becoming poetry. The least easily approached of Mrs. Woolf's novels, it is also her most brilliant and original creation." *The Years* (1937) shows a return to the style and method of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Light House*. *Orlando* takes us to the Elizabethan days and stretches time to include almost eternity.

A. C. Ward describes the books of Virginia Woolf as "exasperatingly shapeless." He regards her books as "snippets cut from a number of cinematograph films and indiscriminately joined up." But as compared to the works of James Joyce, the

novels of Virginia Woolf have a form and a shape of their own. They are lucid and luminous though they may be disjointed in their impressionistic presentation of life.

As a Novelist.

### **Theory of Novel—Stream of Consciousness Technique.**

Virginia Woolf rejected the conventional conception of the novel as a realistic portraiture of life from the objective point of view and attacked the work of Bennett and Galsworthy with characteristic frankness. She once wrote with directness against the work of these masters of fiction. "It is because they are spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and matches, if only into the desert, the better for the soul." Virginia Woolf adopted the method which James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson had practised in their novels. She adopted the method of psychological truth and aimed at expressing in her novels the reality of the life of the spirit. She laid emphasis not on incident, external description and straightforward narration but on the presentation of character through the 'stream of consciousness' method. In her novels we can trace without difficulty the evolution of her vision of life and feel at every stage her concentration on the life of the mind and the spirit. She takes us to the subconscious and unconscious regions and seeks to convey "the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain."

Virginia Woolf has followed the technique of the internal monologue and the stream of consciousness, yet her work is free from the vices and taints of her other fellow workers. There is no trace of filthiness or dirt in her novels. She does not wallow in the mire of filthiness and is always clean and fresh. We seem to breathe in a rarefied atmosphere as we go through her work. There is a poetic quality and a love of lyricism in her writings. "Her work has a lyric rather than an epic quality, but it has a greater sense of order about it, also of cleanliness and purity."

### **Her Characters.**

The range of her characters is small. She could not paint characters who did not share her own unusual qualities. But

when her characters are of her view and to her liking, she portrays them with conviction and faith. Her characters, "belong not only to a certain class, the upper middle-class intelligentsia, but also to a certain temperament. They tend to think and feel and express their thoughts and feelings, in fact, exactly as Virginia Woolf herself does in such non-fiction work as *Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* and *A Room of One's Own*. They are distinguished by a discriminating intelligence and an acute self-consciousness which weave a close sieve through which the greater part of the common experience of life will not pass."

#### **As an Aesthete and Poetic Novelist.**

Virginia Woolf was a great lover of beauty, and her novels exhibit her aesthetic delight in the lovely aspects of life. As presented by her, the aesthetic life is as vigorous and satisfying as any other kind of life. In order to concentrate her attention on the aesthetic aspects of life, she has to exclude other aspects. She cannot present the ugliness of life like Proust and Joyce. Her pictures are exquisitely beautiful and charming. The impressionistic method adopted by her gives impression of what appears charming to her view. She brings out the poetry of life and eschews drabness and sordidness of writers like Joyce. "If Mrs. Woolf had lived in, say, the sixteenth century, she would have written poetry, for poetry was then the common form. As she found herself in a prose age she used prose for what was in truth, poetic material. Her prose is excellent, but it is rather like a beautiful dress on a spiritual form which has existence but no substance."

#### **Her Conception of Reality.**

Virginia Woolf presents real life in her work but her conception of reality was different from that of Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. "She was persuaded that reality, as distinct from realism, is an inward subjective awareness, and that to communicate a sense of it the novelist must abandon the attempt to construct an external world brick by brick and devote himself to the building up of character through the complexity of consciousness." Reality, she construed, as a complex of sensations, feelings, emotions, and ideas, and she presented this conglomeration of feelings, sensations and emotions in her pictures of life to create the sense

of being alive. Her pictures pulsate with life but the panorama unfolded in her works is not of a succession in a straight way happening, but glimpses of life, and very truly do they appear, as A. C. Ward remarks, "snippets cut form a number of cinematograph films and indiscriminately joined up."

#### **Her Style.**

Virginia Woolf is a prose writer of a high order, and her prose sparkles with flashes of poetic beauty and charm. She is a word painter providing snapshots like a photographer. She employs words "with a keen sense of their rhythmic potentialities." She works as a conscious and meticulous artist, and the choice of words shows that she is a cultured woman and a conscious artist.

#### **Conclusion**

"The work of Virginia Woolf has been both highly praised and strongly criticized. Its weaknesses are clear. The world she chose to describe is a limited one in which the characters as a French critic has remarked, 'live in a luminous mist.' It is a world in which there is deep sadness, regret and certain coldness, for the mind and spirit of man reign here. In her depiction, however, of this mind and spirit, in her sense of the passing of time and in the delicacy, grace and order of her prose, Virginia Woolf is outstanding. She was aware, as Sir Thomas Browne was long before her that, life is a pure flame and we live by an invisible sun within us. In its complete illustration of this knowledge her work has an unfailing power" (Cazamian).

**Q. 95. What do you know about the development of the novel from 1939 to 1966 ?**

**Ans.** "We have been reminded with alarming frequency that the English novel of the last thirty years has diminished in scale : that no writer has the moral urgency of a Conrad, the verbal gifts and wit of a Joyce, the vitality and all consuming obsession of a Lawrence; further, that the novel has forsaken its traditional role of delineating manners and morals, and, finally, that the novel is in a decline from which rescue is virtually impossible. Granted that these claims do have partial substance, nevertheless one must insist that the novel of the last

three decades or so—the post *Ulysses* novel—contains the vitality and vigour worthy of a major genre. Granted also that recent years have not turned up another Joyce, Lawrence, or Conrad ; they have, however, seen distinguished work by established writers like Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, C.P. Snow, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Evelyn Waugh, as well as promising novels by their younger contemporaries, Lawrence Durrell, Iris Murdoch, William Goldin, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson, and Philip Toynbee, among several others.”\*

**Graham Greene (1904— )**

Graham Greene, a convert to the Roman Catholic Church, lacks the missionary zeal. He is ruthless, and aloof in his detached rearrangement of life. At its worst he evokes pity and the extremity of terror, and dares to re-interpret Scripture in terms of its Original Charity. His reputation as an outstanding novelist among the younger group of novelists is firmly established with the publication of his novel ‘The Power and the Glory’ (1940). The reason for his success is not so much his versatility, as the way in which he unifies his various and wide interests under a single outlook, and expresses them in a prose style that is almost startling in its starkness. “His sentences cut like broken glass. They have a splintered sharpness, like the stark beams of light that cut obliquely across the pictures of El Greco. He may also be compared to the great painter in his odd distortion of vision. He sees his characters, and the scene in which they make their penance, with an eye that elongates them, draws them into thwart gestures made in a garish light. He delights to expose the raw nerves of evils, showing it as a positive force in the world, a skeleton-like figure working visible mischief in the ordinary, everyday affairs of men and women and children.” He satirises the evils of twentieth-century urban civilization but he does not preach.

Graham Greene wrote a number of novels and they show his popularity. He wrote the following novels : *The Man Within* (1929); *The Name of Action* (1930); *Rumour at Nightfall* (1931); *Stambout Train* (1932); *It's a Battlefield* (1934); *England Made*

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\* F. R. Karl : Contemporary English Novel.

*Me* (1935); *A Gun for Sale* (1936); *Brighton Rock* (1938); *The Confidential Agent* (1939); *The Power and the Glory* (1940); *The Ministry of Fear* (1943); *The Heart of the Matter* (1948); *The Third Man* (1950); *The Fallen Idol* (1951); *The End of the Affair* (1951); *Loser Takes All* (1955); *The Quiet American* (1956); *Our Man in Havana* (1958); *A Burnt-out Case* (1961). Outstanding among these novels is *The Power and the Glory*. It is a political religious novel in the manner of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Magic Mountain*. The scene is laid in a communist state in Mexico. The book almost deals with the seamy side of life, the painful and the squalid, the poverty and the vice. The two main characters of the novel are the Communist Lieutenant and the 'Whiskey Priest' the father of an illegitimate child.

**Joyce Cary (1888 – 1957)**

"He is a versatile, unpredictable, but always interesting writer," says R. A. Scott James. Cary is the most original novelist of his generation and he is the only novelist among his contemporaries who had carried forward the main stream of English fiction. He is a moralist, a traditionalist, a conservative who cannot think of the irrational dominating the rational. He published fifteen novels in all but the following six of them are enjoyable: *Herself Surprised* (1941); *To Be a Pilgrim* (1942); *The Horse's Mouth* (1944); *Prisoner of Grace* (1952); *Except the Lord* (1953) and *Not Honour More* (1955).

**Evelyn Waugh (1903 – )**

He is both a humorous and a serious novelist whose fame chiefly rests on the following six novels: *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1934), *Scoop* (1937), *Put out More Flags* (1942), and *The Loved One* (1948). His very strength as a humorist lies in his freedom to attack in every direction. As a humorist he avoids the moral purpose intrinsic to Meredith's and Moliere's view. All the objects of the world are the target of his farce. Nothing is sacred to him. But he was not a fierce satirist as supposed by so many critics. Frederick R. Karl says, "Waugh has often been called a satirist, but satire presupposes belief, doctrine, dogma. Clearly, in his early and

most effective work, Waugh is defending no one and nothing possibly the only belief that comes through plainly is his defence of the sanctity of the individual, as in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957)."

"Larger issues rarely count in early Waugh, and not until his later work does the reader become aware of the impingement of the world. In the thirties, he was interested in people whose social attitudes mark them as egoists, eccentrics, expedients. In describing their special kind of behaviour, he revels in the fact that insanity is the norm and sanity the anomaly. Later, when sanity, or the search for it, becomes his norm, he appears dull." When he becomes serious in his manner, readers find his grave reflections an inadequate compensation for the loss of his light bantering and carefree humour.

C. P. Snow (1905—).

After the Second World War, C. P. Snow is emerging a major literary figure. He is an author of a number of novels : *Strangers and Brothers* (1940), *The Light and the Dark* (1947), *Time of Hope* (1950), *The Masters* (1951), *The New Men* (1954), *Homecoming* (1956), *The Conscience of the Rich* (1958), *The Affair* (1960), *Corridors of Power* (1964).\* "No iconoclast or protestant, Snow is primarily concerned with the inner workings of traditional institutions and the ways that these elements of society are perpetuated; thus, his interest in lawyers, scientists, academicians, and administrators : all the groups who have assumed power in the twentieth century and make the decisions necessary for civilized life."

"The fiction that Snow writes is akin, in technique and manner, to the average Victorian novel of Thackeray, George Eliot, or John Galsworthy, although it is less complicated in narrative structure and character development than the work of the former two and more closely reasoned than that of the latter. Snow eschews the impressionism and symbolism of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad, and in so doing

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\* "It is written with commendable professional competence. The real deficiency is that the competence, like the characters seem contrived." — (The Sunday Statesman January 10, 1965)

returns the novel to a direct representation of moral, social and political issues. His novelistic world is not distorted or exaggerated : his art rests on artistic re-creation than on faithful reproduction, careful arrangement, and common sensical development of character and situation."

**George Orwell (1903-1950)**

George Orwell, as V. S. Pritchett says, was the conscience of his generation. His fame as a novelist rests on his three novels : *Down and out in Paris and London* (1933), *Burmese Days* (1934) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). The world of the first novel is an economic nightmare to the individual, the world of the last novel is the political nightmare to the hero. There is no denying that these nightmares are true, but Orwell usefully failed in making these personal nightmares the experience of all of us. "His nightmare works out in social and economic terms not psychologically. The novelist cannot successfully convey a twentieth century nightmare solely in nineteenth century terms."

Having accepted Naturalism as the mode for his type of novel, Orwell reports impressionistically and does not attempt false objectivity. "He reports as he sees, but he reorganizes that what he sees is tinged by what he is and by what he chooses to look at. Yet despite the subjectivity of much of Orwell's reporting, we are struck by the compelling clarity of his vision and the sharpness of his images."

"It is one of the paradoxes of literature that someone like Orwell, a spokesman for liberalism and a destroyer of cant, was unable to provide satisfactory fiction although mind saw clearly a world full of conflicts. Perhaps the very clarity of the vision made impossible the 'confusion' and fumbling' which his less politically liberal contemporaries bring to bear upon the novel. Perhaps the very directness of his attack upon the body politic precluded the large novel that Orwell should have written. Once again the specter of Naturalism rises up, and Orwell is ensnared in a literary trap, precisely as his characters are caught in the trap of life."\*

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\* F. R. Karl : Contemporary English Novel.



**Elizabeth Bowen (1899— )**

Miss Bowen is an intensely feminine novelist and shows her affinity to novelists as different as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield. Like Jane Austen, she weighs her morality carefully and concocts a curious kind of moral universe; but unlike Jane Austen, Miss Bowen's good people are not always rewarded nor are the bad ridiculed. As an artist she is also influenced by the example of Jane Austen. "She believes in clarity of detail, precision of phrase, and irony of expression, in exploiting the humorous while eliminating the sentimental, in destroying the hypocritical and the vain, in maintaining the traditions of the past against the incursions of the present. Yet she cannot be certain of what is right, as was Jane Austen, and when her doubts do appear, she finds herself close to the assumptions of the twentieth century novelist: unsure of what success entails, doubtful of what love is, afraid that romance can be easily maimed or destroyed, aware that relationships hang precariously on unknown threads whose clues are mysterious. In brief, she finds herself in the world of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield."

In all Miss Bowen wrote eight novels: *The Hotel* (1927), *The Last September* (1929), *Friends and Relations* (1931), *To the North* (1932), *The House in Paris* (1936), *The Death of the Heart* (1939), *The Heat of the Day* (1949), *A World of Love* (1955). The range of her novels is a limited one. She scores a grand success in presenting young girls, but she lacks the ability in presenting emotionally and mentally developed adults. Her women can be safely placed in the category of 'flat' characters, as they remain static, incapable of development and finally immature in their quivering sensitivity. "Nevertheless, the discerning reader is struck by the limitation of range, the fluttery concern with a miniature world, the exclusion of much that makes life exciting and significant, the complacency with which the novelist repeats both characters and themes. That this charge was once wrongly brought against Jane Austen does not vitiate its application to Elizabeth Bowen—the earlier

novelist's irony and wit often make all the difference."\*

Ivy Compton Burnett (1892—)

"If expert contemporary judgments were faultless, the supreme place among women novelists of the second quarter of the century would be given to Ivy Compton Burnett" (A. C. Ward). She wrote a number of novels : *Dolores* (1911), *Pastors and Masters* (1925), *Brothers and Sisters* (1929), *Men and Wives* (1931), *More women Than Men* (1933), *A House and its Head* (1935), *Daughters and Sons* (1937), *A Family and a Fortune* (1939), *Parents and Children* (1941), *Elders and Betters* (1944), *Man-servant and Maidservant* (1947), *Two Worlds and Their Ways* (1949), *Darkness and Day* (1951), *The Present and the Past* (1953), *Mother and Son* (1955), *A Father and His Fate* (1957), *A Heritage and its History* (1959). The construction in her novels is essentially the same from her first novel—*Dolores* (1911), to *A Heritage and its History* (1959). "The departures from a common structure are fewer than the adherences : Miss Compton Burnett has marked her originality not only in the conversational idiom but in the form of her novels." She wrote domestic novels and her characters are developed round the tightness of family structure. "One achieves something, or is destroyed, not because of the world but because of the family; and a son or daughter reels from family to family seeking a haven. The rebel does not run off to London to find solace in material success, such things do not exist. The family is his all : it dominates, circumvents, encloses, frustrates and provides one with mates."

Like Jane Austen, the range of Ivy Compton Burnett's novels is a limited one. She deals almost exclusively with upper-middle class society of the Edwardian era. Even then she is a popular novelist in the post-war world, because most of the human passions dealt by her does not exclusively belong to one era and in presenting them she is in fact doing so in full awareness of the modern world. She writes about Edwardians; but she would have written quite differently if she had been living among them.

"Like Jane Austen she has no illusions about human

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\* F. R. Karl : *Contemporary English Novel*.

nature and makes no concessions to complacency or wishful thinking; like her she is distrustful of moral generalizations. But a sympathy and understanding for the victims of human wickedness—the evil-doers emerge unmistakably from the drift and texture of the conventionalized dialogues and in the tensions they generate.”\*

Lawrence Durrell (1912—)

Lawrence Durrell, an astonishing all-round man of letters, was one of the probable winners of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1960. He has written the Alexandria *Quartet* of novels—*Justine* (1957), *Balthazar* (1958), *Mountolive* (1959), *Clea* (1960)—described as ‘an investigation of modern love.’ This exciting sequence of novels immediately bears superficial comparison with Joyce’s *Ulysses*. “Like Joyce’s Dublin, Durrell’s Alexandria defines the actions of the characters and in major part makes them what they are. The nationalism of the Dubliner is transformed into the sensuality of the Alexandrian; the narrowness of the Irishman into the flexibility, the sinister softness of the Egyptian. In both novels, the sense of place dominates.”†

The novels of Lawrence Durrell “are unlike anything else in modern fiction, and they are worth reading for the author’s vivid evocation of Alexandria and the strange and sometimes sinister sub-tropical characters who abound there. There are hints that this much-praised quartet of stories was hurriedly composed and the women in them, with one exception, are never more than sketches. On the credit side there is some fine, vehement descriptive prose.”‡

Angus Wilson (1913— ).

He is a very promising force and he is perhaps the only genuine English living satirist, “taking the word satire in its true meaning as a criticism of society related to positive moral standards.” He is a naturalist and provides very realistic and vivid pictures of the post-war society. He is quite capable of handling complicated plots and he has something of the zeal and enthusiasm of Dickens. His best known novels are *Hemlock*

\* Gilbert Phelps : The Novel Today.

† F. R. Karl—Contemporary English Novel.

‡ W. J. Entwistle and E. Gillett—The Literature of England.

and *After* (1952), *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956) and *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* (1958). In these novels Angus Wilson has attempted the 'big novel', the broad canvas. "He cuts across social classes and includes a wide variety of characters who are solidly rooted in English life; unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not restrict himself to one kind of person and one kind of reality."\*

V. S. Pritchett (1900— ).

"He was producing promising work twenty years ago, and has now an assured place among established writers of novels and short stories. He is at home with almost Dickensian humour among working-class types, but there is a subtlety and a poetic background to his work, economy and precision in his style, and a detachment in approach to his subjects which are the reverse of Dickensian." His most famous novel is *Mr. Beluncle* (1951). Pritchett projects Mr. Beluncle's superstitions and shows him as a typically confused modern man who has no command over his mind.

Anthony West (1914— )

In all, West wrote four novels but two of his novels *The Vintage* and *Heritage* are famous among them. In his first novel, he attempted a Faust for our times, but he failed for several reasons. "The episode themselves, the substance of the numerous flashbacks, are too commonplace to bear the weight of such a large design. The imaginative projection of the material is often admirable, but the imagination must itself be rooted in the real before it can soar, and the real here is not sufficient to allow significant thrust."

Henry Green (1905— )

"Henry Green has a style and atmosphere which he has made his own. He wrote his first book, *Blindness* (1926), when he was still in his teens; attracted attention with *Living* (1929), and has since produced 'Party Going' (1939), 'Pack My Bag' (1940), 'Caught' (1943), 'Loving' (1945), and 'Concluding' (1948). He shines as a writer of realistic dialogue, but is in essence a poet, with singular skill in leaving us with a sense of the symbolic significance of the life he has described."

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\* R. R. Karl: *Contemporary English Novel*.

**Christopher Isherwood (1904— )**

"Perhaps no novelist of the last thirty years seemed better equipped than Christopher Isherwood to catch the peculiar tone of his times; he had verbal facility, inventive ability and a sense of form and moment." He is an author of the following novels: *All the Conspirators*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *The Last of Mr. Norris*, *The Memorial*, *Prater Violet*, and *The World in the Evening*.

**Robert Graves (1895— )**

He described his war experiences in the novel—'Goodbye to All That' (1929). perhaps his best novel is 'Claudius' (1934).

**Rex Warner (1905— )**

He wrote a number of allegorical novels, chief among them are: *The Professor* (1939), *The Wild Goose Chase* (1938) and *The Aerodrome* (1941).

**Future of the English Novel.**

A question may generally arise whether English novel has exhausted itself or it has enough scope which can be enlarged by the post-war novelists Gilbert Phelps says, "It remains true that the achievement since the war does not equal that of the earlier years of the century, but there is at least evidence that the English novel is by no means a spent force."\* The same optimistic view is expressed by Dr. David Daiches, "One can only express the hope that with the radio serial and various kinds of television programme taking over the more superficial functions of fiction as entertainment, the novelist may find clever field for the further development of the novel as a real art form." Indeed, the novelist must guard himself against his natural desire to withdraw from the large world into a selective range, because fiction needs weight as well as intelligence, size as well as manner, and breadth as well as nuance. It is gratifying that a merging of Symbolism and Naturalism, as in the work of William Golding, Samuel Beckett, Lawrence Durrell, Graham Greene, Angus Wilson and Irish Murdoch, would perhaps indicate a tentative direction. "Such a combination would allow the inclusion of the pressing events of the day, but at the same time it would not hold the novel to

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\* Gilbert Phelps—The Novel Today. It is an article in 'The Modern Age' edited by Boris Ford.

the level of journalism. The infusion of a symbolic tradition into Naturalism would help transform minor or isolated items into major significance, and yet would not cut the writer off from immediacies like local politics, class structure, personal goals, the nature of ambition, and all the other pressing details of daily existence. If the function of the novel is to do what no other art form can : the definition of man in his society, then the novelist must not detract from the pressures of the great world in favour of exclusive emphasis upon those of the small. Only then can the novel hope to fulfil itself."\*

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\* F. R. Keston: Contemporary English Novel.

# **Prose Literature of the Twentieth Century**

## **NOTE—**

The prose literature of the 20 Century is wide and varied. The prose of this period can broadly be divided under the following heads :—

1. Prose used in novels.
2. Essays.
3. Biographies and Autobiographies.
4. Travel Books.
5. Historical Writings.
6. Philosophical Writings.
7. Scientific Literature.
8. Literary Criticism.
9. Short Story.

We have already dealt with the history of the English novel during the 20th century and the prose employed by novelists in their works in the history of the English novel. In the subsequent pages an attempt will be made to deal with the remaining branches of literature in which prose has been used effectively by literary artists.

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**Q. 96. Give an account of the English Essay and Essayists during the 20 Century.**

**Ans.** During the 20th Century there has been a revival of the periodical essay, and the personal essay which had been cultivated earlier by the 18th and 19th century essayists. The prominent essay writers of the 20th century are the following. We shall deal with their works and their contribution in some detail.

**G. K. Chesterton (1874—1936).**

G. K. Chesterton was a critic, a novelist and a poet of rank but he was also an essayist of great repute. Richard Church called

him 'the greatest essayist of his time.\*' He began his career as a journalist, turning out weekly articles for newspapers and magazines. It was in *The Daily News*, when that paper was edited by A. G. Gardiner, that Chesterton made his earliest reputation. He used to write in its columns upon all manner of books and upon nearly every subject under the sun. A single sentence would be enough to set him at work with an antithesis or proposition that brought the stars into Fleet Street and light into many dark places. But his method was primarily that of a busy journalist—rapid, nervous and clear. He used to sit and write his articles and essays in a Fleet Street cafe. There he would sit, a figure of vast bulk, talking, gurgling with a sort of internal combustion of humour, emitting little groans of sheer pleasure as he scattered the flowers of his fancy. It was characteristic of Chesterton that he should be amused by what he wrote, and by what he said in public.

Chesterton was a serious writer and he had no faith in art for art's sake. He was a satirist and spent his life in vigorously attacking the conclusions arrived at by intellectuals. There was an engaging pugnacity even in his lighter essays. He subjected like Shaw the shams and hypocrisies of the modern age to the hammer blows of his epigrams and witty sayings. "Chesterton caught the infection of satire and epigram during the nineties, but he used these weapons not, like most of his contemporaries for destructive criticism, but for the defence of constructive principles, old faiths and venerable institutions especially the Catholic Church, and for laughing down the sweeping pretensions of science and modern thought."\*\* Chesterton's chief weapons are wit and paradox and these he employed with dexterity and ease. "To those out of contact with the fundamental beliefs which inspired his joyous argumentativeness, he might appear a buffoon intoxicated by his own flow of wit and paradox, and he did develop so marked a style of paradox as to invite parody, but his dazzling fancy and play of words was the sword-play of a sincere and single-hearted

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\* Richard Church—British Authors—A Twentieth Century Gallery.

\*\* Moody Lovett : A History of English Literature.



fighter for his faith."\* His strength as a writer does not lie in the profundity of his thoughts or in the presentation of any original point of view, but in the clear and witty way in which he expresses commonplace truths."† In short, "the quizzical humour, the scintillating wit, the delight in mental gymnastics, in paradox and epigram, and the whole hearted defence of whatever is old, or gay or romantic, are things which distinguish his writings from that of any of his contemporaries."‡

#### Style :

Chesterton had a great skill in dialectical writing. He possessed the gift of writing with peculiar simplicity and beauty, and with utmost clearness. Anti-thesis was his governing passion. He had also a genius for paradox. "Chesterton revels in antithesis, distinctions, identities, and absurdities. He argues usually by analogies and examples, though there is likely to be a real idea behind his display of fireworks, and often he is talking the plainest kind of sense. He has a gift for illustration worthy of a great poet; the world is constantly alive for him, and images occur to him naturally from the farthest end of it. He writes with a perpetual relish for facts, he knows the habits of man and women as a reporter knows them, and he does not forget whatever has once engaged his eyes and ears. He is positive, dogmatic, and sudden in his statements, and seems to find a great deal of fun in speaking extravagantly to an age which has been trained to accept only qualified judgments, to be skeptical about everything." People were not only skeptical about his judgments but also denounced his antithetical and paradoxical style. Dean Inge was vociferous in this respect. Richard Church says, "his literary device of antithesis and startling metaphor became a bad habit." But we should not forget that he had a style of his own which has pleased hundreds of thousands of affectionate readers.

#### Hilaire Belloc (1870—1953).

Chesterton and Belloc were friends and these two ran in harness together on many occasions. It was a popular joke of the

\* A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

† Compton Rickett : A History of English Literature.

‡ E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

mes to refer to them as a hybrid creature, 'The Chesterbelloc.' elloc was an essayist, critic, poet, journalist and a writer of travel books. The collection of his essays is to be found in *April* (1904) *Till on the Sea* (1906), *On Nothing* (1908), *On Everything* (1910) and *On Something* (1911). His essays are satirical and witty and owe their attractiveness to the graceful ease and simplicity of his prose style, and the imagination and insight of the poet which often underlie them." The most unpleasant feature of his prose style is his habit of expressing himself at the top of his voice. In the essay on *Getting Respected at Inns and Hotels* he advised :

"As you come into the place go straight for the smoking room, and begin talking of the local sport, and do not talk humbly and tentatively as many do, but in a loud authoritative tone."

**Edward Verrall Lucas (1868—1938)**

E. V. Lucas, a journalist of wide learning, is recognised as the pre-eminent editor of Charles Lamb's works and biographer of Lamb. His editions of the life and letters of Charles Lamb was the result of lifelong sympathy and devoted research. It goes to his credit that he popularised the lore of Charles Lamb in the twentieth century. Though he wore the mantle of Lamb, yet there are a few dissimilarities between the two writers. In the words of A. C. Ward, "The robust urbanity and sophistication of Lucas made him unlike Lamb, who, though he knew, 'more about what books are worth reading than any one living,' wore all his knowledge with a deceptive air of innocence : he was 'all for quietness and not being seen, and having his own thoughts and his own jokes.'"

The essays of Lucas are found in *Character and Comedy* (1907), *Old Lamps for New* (1911) *Loiterer's Harvest*, *Cloud and Silver* (1916). His essays enjoyed immense popularity. They are marked by fancy, literary artifice, common sense, lightness of touch, ease and humour. His humour, though generally kind and humane, is sometimes almost harsh and savage as in 'Those Thirty Minutes' in which he rails against those people who agonize their friends by seeing them off on railway journeys. His essays are mainly characterized by his urbanity, ruthlessness of observation and fancy. "In his thoughts," remarks Frank Swinnerton, "he has no superficiality; but his essays and fictions

are written with his fancy and his playful mind, and it is only at times, as in the Swinburne sketch, that one glimpses a judgment to which the facile enthusiasms of his fellow-creatures are as the idle howlings of tomcats on urban rooftops." His essays reveal that he had a great liking for the curious, the human and the ridiculous. "Offer him a story, an incident, or an absurdity, and his mind will instantly shape it with wit and form. He can read a character with wisdom, and gravely turn it to fun. He will versify a fancy, or concentrate in an anecdote or insistence all that a vulgar mind might stagger for an hour to express. But his is the mind of a critic and a commentator; and the hideous sustained labour of the ambitious novelist would be abhorrent to him."

#### Robert Lynd (1879 - 1949)

Robert Lynd was one of the most outstanding essayists of the 20th century. He began his career as a journalist and for nearly twenty years under the name of "YY" appeared his weekly essay in *The New Statesman and Nation*. Like Chesterton he had the Fleet Street for his background, and though he was out and out a journalist, his prose is not vitiated by the defects of journalism. His sentences are flawless, his diction is chaste and show by a fine taste and even his subject is not of temporary interest. In the words of J. B. Priestley, "He has marched into literature by way of journalism, the day's round, the common task. It is not everybody's way; it is especially suitable for writers with well stored, sane and masculine minds, men who can take hold of experience and translate it freely, who can ransack their own minds and plunder the outside world with an equal measure of success; and when once a man does enter literature by this road, there can be no doubt as to his capacity; he is worth hearing." Indeed, he is worth reading for his urbanity, wit and humour, engaging style and his passive philosophy of life which we can gather from his weekly commentary upon passing events for nearly twenty years.

The essays of Robert Lynd are to be found in *The Pleasure of Ignorance* (1921), *Collected Essays* (1923), *The Money Book* (1925), *The Green Man* (1928), *It is Fine world* (1930). His essays are personal in character and reveal his likes and dislikes on

variety of subjects. They are marked with a note of sincerity. "Those who knew him," remarks A. S. Collins, "have testified to the natural sincerity and sterling worth of the man, and his essays are the man." He knew himself well and there was no conflict in his personality. "At ease with the world and himself" says A. S. Collins, "he wrote with a detachment that gives a timeless wisdom to his commentary on life. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he did not want to change the world, but only to encourage it to live, sanely, decently and happily." He wrote about his memoirs and experiences, but his essays are not disfigured by egotism. He writes with modesty and as though he has infinite leisure.

It is a characteristic of Robert Lynd to be timeless. He has the same broad and enduring appeal which he enjoyed in his life time. The charm of his essays lies in his twinkling humour which is not away from irony. Though he was humane and tolerant, yet he had an ironic whip for cant and humbug, bunkum and brutality, malice and intolerance. His reflections on flotsam and jetsam of life are sometimes grave, though often they are marked with gaiety and gusto.

Lynd is a writer of fine, critical prose, and his essay on *Modern Poetry* exhibits his insight into modern poetry and poetic trends. His observations on poets also seem to be convincing because he has a way of saying that is very convincing. His estimate of Walter De la Mare is a specimen of sound judgment and charming style. "Of all contemporary poets, there is none who is so obviously the poet of home-sickness as Mr. De la Mare. He is the poet of love shackled with vain longing for lovely things that pass, for love that passes. He draws consolation, however from the fact that, though things pass, they pass in a perpetuity of beauty."

It is not easy to label Robert Lynd for he will be sure to mislay it. In the words of Richard Church, "Examine his essays, and you will see how he builds up an argument by a skilful illustration of exceptions; how he reabsorbs those exceptions, and closes down with a neat, swift stroke that shows no temporizing hand. With all his tolerance, Lynd is implacable in his detestation of bunkum and brutality. His taste is unerring. As a critic of

morals and art he is stable because he knows his own instinct and their foundations in a tradition which he can defend full and consciously. Sanity, a deep penetrating humour born from a love of his fellowmen, a quick appreciation of nature, these are faculties of an essayist who perhaps pleases himself in being deceptive. His depth, like that of a clear pool into which the sun is shining, is greater than it seems. Such is Robert Lynd still eluding the critic."

#### Prose Style :

"Very early in his career Robert Lynd cultivated the qualities that stood him in good stead as an author. He cultivated and disciplined his language and he is never careless in writing even a single sentence. The chief fault of journalism, the 'slipshod' writing, is never the fault of Lynd. His sentences are all neatly turned out and evenly balanced. Lynd belongs to Ireland and it will not be out of place to mention that some of the purest prose writers of English have been Irish by birth Swift and Shaw—to name only two of a crowded galaxy—have given to English Literature a prose the like of which is hard to find in English". J. B. Priestley says, "Mr. Lynd's prose has variety, modulation, like all good prose, it has a rhythm of its own. Occasionally it descends into 'snip-snap', but, generally beneath its quite ease and gentle 'hurry of the spirit', there is some very delicate modulation, and a certain characteristic rhythm that turns his prose into a voice."

The style of Robert Lynd is thoroughly conversational, pleasing and not unmingled with humour and irony. His love of epigrammatic sentences, his clarity and lucidity, his sense of balance, the use of similes, the phrase-making gift are the outstanding qualities of his prose style.

#### A. G. Gardiner (1865—1946)

Popularly known as Alpha of the Plough, A. G. Gardiner was a journalist and an essayist of great repute and wide appeal. He was the editor of the *Daily News* from 1902 to 1919. He wrote a book on the prominent personalities of the time and called it '*Prophets, Priests and Kings*.' His typical collection of essays such as *Pebbles on the Shore* (1916) and *Leaves in the Wind* (1920) are the light easy talk of an ordinarily thoughtful man.

As an essayist Gardiner assumed the role of a preacher and a moralist. As Addison wrote for the correction of 18th century manners and society, Gardiner wrote for uplifting the manners and morals of the war-ridden English society. It was a delicate task because people are not prepared to listen to sermons. Fortunately Gardiner could claim a cheerful disposition, a facile pen, a style that could win the confidence of his readers. He never tried to impose his views upon the reader. He did not show that he was preaching. He simply suggested in his own sly manner what he wanted his readers to practise. He was teaching when he was trying to delight and entertain his readers. He won the confidence of his readers by using many simple anecdotes, incidents and stories. In his essay 'On Courage' he emphasised upon well-calculated sacrifice for the sake of the nation by narrating the story of the sailor, who in cold blood, accepted death for the sake of another sailor. His was an example of marvellous courage and through this incident the writer taught the lesson of sacrifice for others.

A. G. Gardiner is one of the most lovable and pleasant writers of English essays. Each essay of Gardiner is a source of pure pleasure. For Gardiner any subject was good enough for writing and he wrote with perfect ease, confidence and grace. The subject-matter of his essays may be trifling but the attention of the reader never flags. He engages the attention of the reader from the beginning to the end of his essay, and this he does by the charm of his intimate, confessional style. To quote W. L. Phelps, "It is an intimate, confessional style of composition, where the writer takes the reader into confidence, and talks as if to only one listener talks too, about thing often essentially trivial, and yet making them for the moment interesting by the charm of the speaker's manner."

The essays of Gardiner are marked with a note of pleasant humour. His humour is not away from satire. His pen was dipped in gall. He criticised the system of justice in his country. In the essay *On Rumour* the school master was the prey of "the lying tongue of rumour." His wife committed suicide. "And the jury did not say 'killed by slander' they said, 'Suicide while of unsound mind'. Oh ! Cautious jurymen !" Only three words

they are but they speak volumes of the legal system of England. His pen did not spare, when a question of principles was involved, even the biggest person living or dead. His sarcasm in the words 'I love the subtleties of the ingenious Mr. Belloc' is noteworthy.

Gardiner's descriptive vein finds an equally good exposition in his essays. He is particularly interested in describing the sights and scenes of nature in his essays, and his descriptions are exquisitely beautiful. Here is a sample of his descriptive power—"The far horizon was still-stained wine-red with the last embers of the day; northward over the shoulder of the hill the yellow moon was rising full-orbed into the night sky and the firmament glittered with a thousand lamps."

#### Prose Style :

Gardiner's prose style is the secret of his charm. The charm of his essays lies in the choice of words, the happy phrasing and the simple sentence construction. He uses very simple vocabulary and the reader moves on from word to word, from sentence to sentence without the slightest effort. This effortless ease is the first quality of Gardiner's style. He makes use of simple words. In his essay 'On Big Words' he has explained his attitude to the choice of words. "It is an excellent thing," says he, "to have a good vocabulary, but one ought not to lard one's common speech or every day letters with long words.....We do not make a thing more impressive by clothing it in grand words any more than we crack a nut more neatly by using a sledge hammer; we only distract attention from the thought to the clothes it wears. If we are wise our wisdom will gain from the simplicity of our speech, and if we are foolish our folly will only shout the louder through big words." "A fine use of words," he remarks a little later, "does not necessarily mean the use of fine words.....Quite ordinary words employed with a certain novelty and freshness can wear distinction that gives them not only significance but a strange and haunting beauty."

Gardiner writes with great charm and ease and his prose has the qualities of a good talk. He enlivens his essays by using stories and anecdotes and by his subtle use of humour and light satire. He also makes a wonderful use of adjectives. 'A world of gigantic whispers' 'a frenzy of rejoicing,' the lying

tongue of rumour' have vividness and clarity that impress the reader. Above all, his sentence structure is very simple—"What we have to guard against in this matter of rumours is the natural tendency to believe what we want to believe." It is so clear and so telling. The reader feels that he has often thought of it but never could express it so well. Simple words, simple phrases, and simple sentences have a magic of their own. And in this lies the wide appeal of A. G. Gardiner.

**Max Beerbohm—(1872–1956).**

Max Beerbohm, the Oxford man who won thundering popularity by his *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) which shook Oxford, was a delightful essayist, an entertaining parodist and a dramatic critic. In his *Christmas Garland* he has parodied the styles and writings of A. C. Benson, Wells, Conrad, Bennett, Shaw and a dozen other writers. He had the art of picture painting and could portray the mind of a contemporary in a phrase. He had the vision of a penetrating critic. He excelled in wit, irony and exposure of the foibles of his own times and that of the Victorian age. "In an age of hurry he never hurried; in a machine age he preserved in his writings and drawings the delicate craftwork of a more leisured and less strenuous time; in an age when most people could write moderately well, but few had anything to write about, he was perfect both in manner and matter."\*

"He holds a high place among twentieth century essayists : he is completely original, whereas others carried on the tradition of the early nineteenth century periodical essayists. He is a creative critic of literature and life, with a generous streak of special genius ; a philosophic jester bursting bubbles of snobbery and pretence with wit and irony and satire. He played little if any part in the social and political turmoil of his time ; but little escaped his notice. He could portray the mind of a contemporary in a phrase and with a few strokes of the pencil fix both body and soul upon paper."\*\*

**Style :**

Simplicity, economy, rhythm and balance are the hall marks of Max Beerbohm's prose style. His diction is as simple

\* A. C. Ward—*Twentieth Century Literature*.

\*\* Ibid.



as the Bible. He has the power to captivate the eye of the reader by the very first word of his essay and holds it to the last. He knows the art of placing each word in its place, a secret known to only the greatest of English prose-writers. "His prose is as precise and pure as any in the language, and his wit belongs with the rarest—with that of Shakespeare, Congreve, Sterne and Oscar Wilde."\*

"Max Beerbohm brushes lightly, delicately, wittily, over the surface of life, with great tenderness for all that he has enjoyed, and unfailing humour." Max Beerbohm is nothing if not a humorist. He was a humorist *Par excellence*. He laughed at the foibles and freaks of human beings but his pen was not dipped in gall. He was piercingly critical without ever-being unkindly. He laughed pointedly and without cruelty at the foibles of men. He laughed where he loved; and loved where he laughed; but he neither beamed nor sniggered. He was a sympathetic critic of human foibles. "In his observations, and in his style, there is 'nothing too much', but there is always just enough.....His is the kind of writing which English literature is supposed not to have; though in fact there is every kind of writing in English."†

J. B. Priestley (1894— )

Priestley, the critic, is also a fine essayist. His essays find a place in *I for One* (1923), *Open House* (1927), *Apes and Angles* (1928), *The Balconinny and other Essays* (1929), and *Self-Selected Essays* (1932). "Priestley had a good deal of the essayist in his make up as a novelist, and in the essay itself the broad humanity, the shrewd sense of true values of living, the knowledge of men, the power of narrative and the humour that were his strength as a novelist appeared in attractive condensation."‡ His essays are literary and critical and his studies on T. L. Peacock and Meredith (E. M. L.) are penetrating and sharp. In *The English Comic Characters*, he "produced a very happy variation of the essay in evoking some of the great comic

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\* C. A. Doren and M. V. Doren—*American And British Literature since 1890*.

† R. A. Scott-James—*Fifty years of English Literature*.

‡ Dr. A. S. Collins : *English Literature of the 20th Century*.

figures like Toby Belch and his associates and Jane Austin's Mr. Collins and discussing them as though they were living people. Indeed nearly all his essays are enriched by allusions drawn from his wide reading in a manner resembling Hazlitt's."\*

Priestley writes a familiar and a simple style. His avowed object is to be simple. "Deliberately I aim at simplicity and not complexity in my writing. No matter what the subject in hand might be, I want to write something that at a pinch I could read aloud in bar-parlour. (And the time came when I was heard and understood in a thousand bar-parlours). I do not pretend to be subtle and profound, but when I am at work I try to appear simpler than I am. Perhaps I make it too easy for the reader, do too much of the toiling and sweating myself."

"As a verbal craftsman he is admirable, for he loves his medium of words and uses them with imagination."\*\* His choice of words is happy. His use of epithets, adjectives and participles has been very happy and his words create humour and provide an ironical flavour to the whole sentence. Mark the boisterous humour produced by the word 'bellowed' in the sentence—"But motor cars and aeroplanes are quite impossible, allowing nothing but a grim frozen silence occasionally shattered by a bellowed remark." His adjectives are very graphic and vivid and sometimes help the reader to form clear, vivid mental images. But "when his writing glistens with a brilliant aptness of adjective and felicity of metaphor it is not because he has retired to a chalet in the mountains of a florentine villa. He has not tied a scented towel round his head or sat fiddling for a whole morning with the cut of a sentence or the cadence of a line. He has simply been smoking a pipe and tapping on a type-writer; no exquisite, museum-worthy manuscripts emerge from Priestley; his hand writing is bad enough to be unusable and he rarely uses it. He a worker who employs the machinery of his trade and has a friendly feeling for those clickety—clack contraptions which others regards as odious utilities."

E. V. Knox.

He was the editor of the *Punch* for several years from

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\* Richard Church—British Authors.

\*\* Ibid.

1932. He was a verse parodist but his essays in prose are his lasting contribution to literature. His essays are witty and wise and embody his observation on life.

#### A. A. Milne

His two volumes of essays are *Not That It Matters* (1919), *If I May* (1920). "In comparison with Priestley's, the essays of A. A. Milne are considerably slighter, but their whimsical humour and agreeable sentiment are conveyed by a durable grace of style and may well make them outwear the years."\*

Here is a typical example of his humorous style—

"Of the fruits of the year I give my vote to the orange..... One wonders why? The answer is convincing enough—

"It is well that the commonest fruit should be also the best. Of the virtues of the orange I have not room fully to speak."— and then he proceeds to enumerate the virtues of the orange.

#### Alice Meynell (1847—1922).

She was a poetess, a critic and an essayist. Her essays are reflective and quiet in tone and belong to the Edwardian period. "The collected *Essays of Alice Meynell* show that whether she wrote of Andromeda and Arcturus, of laughter or colours, children or sleep, her touch was and delicate her vision clear."\*\* She was an essayist of an austere and reticent type and her emotions were well disciplined and expressed in a chiselled language.

#### Dean Inge—(1890—)

Dean Inge has to his credit *Lay Thoughts of a Dean* and *Outspoken Essays* 1919 and 1922. Inge began as a journalist and his articles in the London *Evening Standard* "were a journalistic adaptation of the Baconian essay, being serious thoughts on serious subjects seen in the light of current events."† His finest work is to be found in his *Outspoken Essays*. In these essays W. R. Inge wrote fearlessly without fear or favour and each essay bears the stamp of his strong mind. He had an argumentative way of putting things and advocated emigration to decrease over population and the study of eugenics

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\* A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

\*\* A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

† A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

to improve the racial stock. He attacked vigorously war-mongers and militarists and expressed his opinions in a forceful and categorical manner. Here are a few opinions of Inge which exhibit his confidence in himself and the surety of touch with which he expressed them. His views on politics are radical.

(1) "A nation which gives itself to immoral aggrandizement is far on the road to disintegration. (2) By any national standard of morality few greater scoundrels have lived than Fredrick the Great and Napoleon 1. (3) The apotheosis of the state, whether in the interest of war or of revolution is an anachronism and an absurdity. (4) To worship the state is to worship a demon who has not even the redeeming quality of being intelligent. (5) The freedom of the individual is sacred and ought to be maintained."

The statements of Inge quoted above exhibit his fearless nature and his ability to give blows to accepted notions of history and politics. But when he wrote about religion he wrote from the heart and exhibited a tender and humble spirit. In judging the progress of the world he adopted the attitude of a cynic and in the essay *Idea of Progress* he refused to believe that there has been any progress in the present. He saw a gloomy future for humanity. He was nicknamed "the gloomy Dean" because of his pessimistic attitude towards life.

R. A. Scott James nicely sums up the position of Inge as an Essayist in the following words—"Dean Inge was occupied mainly in academic studies and the writing of books the most notable of which were concerned with various aspects of the history and practice of mysticism. He entered upon a new phase of activity and descended into the arena of controversial essay-writing, and in the third and fourth decades of the century poured forth series of brilliant, combative essays in the best Edwardian manner proving that no style is out of date when it is backed by learning, sense for language and sympathy with the living. His conservatism, his respect for tradition, his dislike of demagogy, were expressed with a dour frankness that won for him the sobriquet of the gloomy Dean."\*

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\* R. A. Scott James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

**Charles Morgan.**

Morgan is an essayist of the artistic and philosophic school, and his belief is that the world of the spirit means more than the world of action. His style is, "dreamlike in its slow majestic movement. It is a confident style without modernism or striving; very personal in an abstract sort of way; classic, resourceful diction, searched out images: a Platonic turn of thought and speech."

**Rebecca West.**

Her essays are psychological and deal delicately with problems of psychological affinities and human institutions. She is also a satirist and her satire is directed against man and his affairs. She exhibits a general susceptibility. Her style is "smooth-flowing, rounded outlines, periodic accomplished: witty and tastefully wrapped up: but wanton, full of fresh, charming concerts: full of apt thoughts verging on the epigrammatic."

**Ernest Hemingway.**

He is a realist and his preception of reality is marked with a note of grimness. His writings suggest despair and casualness. His style has a clear metallic ring. It is vivid though there is careful word economy. His style is as stark as his outlook on life.

**E. E. Cummings.**

He is a whimsical type of essayist. "His mind lies open to catch all chance fancies that hang about the fringes of consciousness." He has a scrupulous respect for all the odds and ends of mind content. His style is impressionistic. "It is a medley of objective and subjective: much that is clear and graphic, but interlarded with personal reactions and allusions that are often obscure to the reader. Imagist i. e. he tends to use words as a painter uses colour as a plastic material. There is much poetry here, too. There is much pretence at simplicity, but it is not really simple, but highly sophisticated, with a complicated background showing through, leaving an impression of precocity by amusing and stimulating work reading like an interesting dairy.

**C. E. Montague.**

He is an optimist and his essays reveal his love for life. He

inspires us to enjoy life to the full. His essays exhibit his thoughtfulness for the goodness of life. "He writes as one who has good news : no limitations or narrowness and few doubts." His style is "Full flavoured, brilliant, matured." He is vigorous, scholarly, rhetorical, cadenced, well-balanced in his writings.

**Edmund Blunden.**

He is an essayist of the countryside. His essays reveal his feeling for all objects of the countryside whether beautiful or ugly, rare or humdrum. His style is partly heavy, suddenly light. He wrote with deliberation and some of his sentences are ponderous. He "makes his own thought about the object rather than the object itself clear to the reader, and yet he takes the reader along with him."

**Maurice Baring.**

His essays are reminiscent in character and are written in a leisurely fashion. There are anecdotes and gossips turned out with an air of detachment. His style is "desiccated and effortless. It is easy reading, easily digested as it was meant to be : has the exaggeration and approximation common to most gossip."

**Aldous Huxley (1894—1963)**

Aldous Huxley is well-known for his novels. Besides his novels, he has written quite a good number of essays, short and witty. Huxley is primarily a writer of satire and irony. One gets tired of reading his philosophico-satirical novels since they sting and bite too much. They are based on, what Miss Neill calls an anti-humanitarian Philosophy. But his essays are much more interesting and pleasing to read, in spite of the fact that the satirical element is never absent from them. His essays are collected in the volumes called *Music at Night* and *Do What You Will*.

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**Q. 97. Write a note on Twentieth Century Biography, and Autobiography and evaluate the work of the prominent Biographers and Autobiographers of the present age.**

**Ans.** Biography and Autobiography have been very popular during the 20th century. Till the year 1918 there were few biographies of distinction and those biographies, which were

also pieces of literature, were few and far between. It was Lytton Strachey (1880—1932) who gave to English biography a new form and shade. His *Eminent Victorians* (1918) was warmly received and six reprints were called for in seven months. It was highly praised and a host of imitators sought to shine in the new field in which Strachey could break a new ground and achieved rare success.

What was Lytton Strachey's method as a biographer? He was the first biographer who "broke away from the heavy laudatory biographical monuments which had become the rule from Victorian days." Instead of praising sky-high the heroes of his biographies as gods of the earth, he examined them critically and found that they were ordinary men of flesh and blood, and shared the common foibles and weaknesses of erring human beings. The eminent Victorians of whom Strachey wrote were Cardinal Newman, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, General Gordon and Florence Nightingale. These were Victorian idols of whorship and were then the object of public veneration. They had been idolised by the Victorians. It was Strachey's job to examine their work critically and bring them out in their true colours. He took them off their pedestals. He made statements about his figures which staggered and shook the people of his times. 'He had salutary things to say; he said them provocatively and without romantic embroidery.' 'He saw them instead as very human figures with amusing weaknesses, with comedy in their grandeur. He shone a strong searchlight on them, which caught them off their guard and revealed details that he sober conventional biographers had thought unworthy of notice or better omitted.'\* So viewed the *Eminent Victorians* ceased to be V. I. Ps. For example Florence Nightingale had been idolised as the Lady of the Lamp, who had been extremely kind and generous to the soldiers. But Strachey showed that "She was the Lady of the Lamp in her spare moments. At other times she was an Angel of Wrath armed with thunderbolts, which she never hesitated to throw."† Thus, what signalises the work of Strachey is the *ironic art* and the Stracheyan irony became famous during the 20th century. Men of the older

\* A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

† A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

generation denounced Strachey's ironical portraiture of idolised Victorian characters but their denunciation could have no effect on Strachey and his followers. The success that greeted Strachey in his first venture inspired him to write another biography, this time of the popular Queen Victoria The picture of Queen Victoria is sympathetically drawn. *Queen Victoria* is, "a movingly human revelation of the queen and the woman, leaving her, for all his ironic manner, a figure to be liked and admired, and presenting his portrait in far fewer pages than had formerly been considered necessary for serious biographical work."\* *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928) followed *Queen Victoria*. Here he seems "rather out of his depth historically." His *Portraits in Miniature* (1931) is a collection "of relatively slight sketches including brief studies of some of the older English historians." Strachey's style is sweeping and the sentences are winding. His style may appear a little teasing because of his longwinded sentences, but "if the winding sentences were made straight by reducing the number of adjectives and qualifying phrases, the 'superfluous' word would often carry away with them that pervasive irony which runs through every line and is the spirit of Lytton Strachey's prose."\*\*

Strachey's great achievement had been to give to Biographical Literature a new life and a new form. He reinstated biography as a literary art and presented truth from a personal perspective in a dazzling style full of colour and contrast. His followers could not be very successful for they "aped his irreverence of approach and his dazzle of style without sharing his power of penetrating and illuminating the subject.")

**Phillip Guedalla (1889—1944)**

He was considerably influenced by the example of Strachey, and though not actually his disciple, at least shared some of his principles. Strachey had stated that biography is 'the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing'. Guedalla said, "Biography is the painting of portraits and it is impossible to paint them without a touch of art."

The biographical sketches of Guedalla are wittily drawn and they startle us by their continual glitter of wit. In his *Supers and*

\* A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century

\*\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature



*Supermen* (1920), *Masters and Men* (1922) and *A Gallery*, there are fine sketches of Victorians and their contemporaries. We have pictures of Disraeli, Lord Asquith, Hardy and Wells. What makes these pictures and portraits somewhat unsatisfactory is the witty way of the author. Strachey had combined matter with manner, but Guedalla was all for *manner* of expression rather than for substance. "His subjects deserved something better than the manner of a brilliant undergraduate, irresponsibly scoring point after point in a tone of super amusement." Guedalla was "capable of sense and brilliance together, but he played about with words recalling the worst mannerisms of Oscar Wilde, Chesterton and Lytton Strachey. "These defects were mitigated to some extent in his full studies of *Palmerston* (1926) and *The Duke of Wellington* in (1931). In these works Guadella had toned down his witticism. He became sober and his treatment "preserving only the merits of the new approach, admirably matched his subjects."

Sir Osbert Sitwell (1892—).

Osbert Sitwell brought out the history of his own family in five volumes, *Left Hand, Right Hand*, (1945), *The Scarlet Tree* (1946), *Great Morning* (1948), *Laughter in the Next Room* (1949). In 1950 Sitwell added the fifth volume *Noble Essence* which was not in the original plan. In these volumes we have portraits of Sitwell's father, friends and relatives. These works of Sitwell reveal his love for the past and his disgust for the present. He seems to be writing an elegy upon "that halcyon age in which he grew up" in contrast to the present age which seems to him "this cruel and meaningless epoch." He is all for Victorianism and states, "I should like to emphasise that I want my memories to be old-fashioned and extravagant—as they are." In his vision of the Victorians there is none of the irreverence of Strachey. He has rather a great reverence for the old Victorians and is a pleasant contrast to Strachey.

Among the other important biographical works of the 20th century place must be given to Lord David Cecil's *The Stricken Deer* which deals with the life of the poet Cowper and the *Two Quiet Lives* (1948) dealing with Gray and his contemporary, Collins, Virginia Woolf's *Life of Roger Fry* (1940), Peter Quennell's *Byron Italy* (1940) and *Four Portraits* (1945), Sean

Casey's *I Knock at the Door* (1939); Duff Cooper's *Talleyrand* (1932), St. John Erwine's *Parnell*, Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905); George Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903); Sasson's *The Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928) and *The Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930); H. G. Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934); J. B. Barrie's *The Greenwood Hat* (1937); Rudyard Kipling's *Something of Myself* (1937); Havelock Ellis's *My Life* (1940); Arthur Bryant's *Charles II* (1921) and *Samuel Pepys*; Michael Sadleir's *Trollope* (1927); P. P. Aowe's *Hazlitt* (1922); John Buchan's *Montrose* (1918); *Oliver Cromwell* (1938) and *Augusts* (1937); Robert Graves's *Goodbye To all That* (1929).

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**Q 98** Write a note on the Literature of Travel during the 20th Century

**Ans** "No language is richer than English in the literature of travel, and its reputation has been well sustained in the last thirty years."\* The Arab countries of the Middle East have exercised a fascination on the minds of English travellers who have enriched literature by their accounts of the Arabian people. "The desert scene, the Arab temperament, the enduring monuments of ancient civilizations, the survival of patriarchal habits which seem familiar to all versed in the Old Testament" are brought out in the works of these English travellers to the east in whom the love of practical adventure is combined with the love for the romantic and the mystical conspicuously present in the East. To this class belong Burton's *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* Gertrude Lowthian Bell's *The Desert and the Sun* and T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935), together with the fine writings of Freya Stark, Bertram Sidney Thomas.

**T. E. Lawrence ( 888—193 )**

Lawrence's work is the most significant of the travel literature of the 20th century. Lawrence became a legend and a man of mystery in Arabia and round his name many rumours were woven. He was loved and admired by the Arabs whom he greatly

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\* R. A. Scott-James : *Fifty Years of English Literature*.

helped in organising against the mighty forces of the Turks.

*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a historic book and is an *epic in prose* recounting vividly and enthusiastically the glorious fights of the Arabs against the Turks, and the primitive manners and customs of the Arabs which remind one of the details of *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*. The author succeeds eminently in presenting subtle analysis of the characters of the chiefs and the generals of the Arabs such as Feisal, the conscious artist among leaders. Auba, a Diomede of the Arabs, and Abdulla the soul of the warriors marching by devious ways towards Damascus. The epic theme of the book has been well handled, and it is full of heroes of the *Iliad*, the author himself being the Achilles of the Arabs. The book is extremely egotistical in character and reveals considerably the author who succeeded in the unification of the Arabs against the Turks and in guiding them to their triumph. In this book the man and the matter are interlinked and it reveals as much of Lawrence as the sandy desert of Arabia. "The ultimate source of the distinction of the book is the impact upon one of the most complex and problematical of personalities of a great heroic experience. The result may best be regarded as a modern prose epic, unique example of the appearance of a heroic narrative in an era disinclined to the grand style."\* The style of the author is vivid and graphic and is marked with a note of grandeur rarely to be found in travel-literature. Lawrence's book is "probably the greatest non-imaginative narrative to appear in the interval between the two world wars."

H. M. Tomilson (187 —),

Tomilson is another great contributor to the travel literature of the 20th century. He made a name for himself by his *The Sea and the Jungle* (1912) in which he recounted his voyage to South America right up into the heart of the jungle. *London River* (1921) gives a vivid and appreciative account of a port whose ships sailed to the Seven Seas. *Tidemarks* (1924) has its subtitle, "some records of a journey to the beaches of the Mohiccas and the forest of Malaya." In *Face of the Earth*

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

(1950) Tomilson describes vividly his trip from England to Spain in a small vessel in the company of a few friends. *Malaya Waters* (1951) is an enthralling work in which the courage and endurance of sailors in the second world war who had gone out to fight in exotic land has been vividly and heroically presented. "In these and all his books Tomilson writes as a born traveller, who might have been bred in the traditions of the sea, as one who knows all the technicalities of seamanship and who is moreover a most observant man of all the encounters. He never overwrites, but his style is the man, original, philosophical, humorous."

**Sacheverell Sitwell (1897—).**

Sitwell, the poet, is a writer of many travel books of literature. His books include *Southern Baroque Art* (1924), *The Gothic North* (1929—30), *Touching the Orient* (1934), *Prime Scenes and Festivals* (1935). The spirit of Sacheverell Sitwell is very much different from that of Tomilson. Whereas Tomilson loved travel and sea voyage for its own sake and for the joy of adventure, Sitwell loves not so much the journey and the adventure, as the people and the scenery of foreign countries. He is interested in the art, architecture, music, literature, festivals of the countries visited by him. He identifies himself with the countries he visited and becomes one of them. "He likes to slip from the present into the remote past, and loves especially those places and those peoples where the past can still be felt below the surface, and even on the surface of the present. Then his spirit broods in enchanted contemplation, his prose takes on music, while the scene rises before our eyes in all its sensuous detail in a shimmering tapestry of words."\* His selection of his own prose writing in *The Homing of the Winds* (1942) forms a fine introduction to his general works. Sitwell's style is poetic in character and he writes in the following manner—"Where, then, is wisdom? In the arts, and not in war. In the cold and not in the heat. In this music and its lilies. In the arts and in the senses. In the bright wing and in the golden leaf."

**Hilaire Belloc ( 870— 9 )**

Belloc's two works *Path To Rome* and *Cruise of the Nona*

belong to the literature of travel. *The Path to Rome*, "is a rambling gossipy book, written in unornamented but pictorial prose; without much set or formal descriptive comment, yet clearly suggesting the widely differing appearance and character of places and people."\* The book describes the author's journey on foot from Toul, down the valley of the Moselle, to Italy. It brings in a graphic manner the hills and valleys, rivers and trees and churches, of the countries that come in the way of Belloc's journey to Rome.

#### Cunninghame Graham (1852—1936)

The travel accounts of Cunninghame Graham are about Scottish life and character. "His pages are vigorous as life itself. While Hudson is placid and meditative, with passages sweet as birdsong, Graham is turbulent and acrid and explosive, restless as the broken waters of a mountain stream falling over jagged rocks."\*\* He has presented the East in *Mogreb-el Acksa*, and *From the Mouth of the Sahara*, and his descriptions in these two books are poetic and illuminating. Here is an example of Cunninghame Graham's descriptive vein in his eastern tales of travel.

"The night descended on the town and the last gleams of sunlight flickering on the walls turned paler, changed to violet and grey, and the pearl-coloured mist creeping up from the palm woods outside the walls enshrouded everything."

The travel records of Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence and Graham Greene have already been discussed in the section of modern Fiction. Among other writers who have contributed to Travel Literature of the 20th century, reference ought to be made to Norman Douglas's *Old Calabria* (1915) and his other books about the Mediterranean area, Freya Stark who wrote about Arabia, Rosita Forbes whose accounts of Egypt and the East are picturesque and entertaining. H. V. Morton in his *Steps Of The Master* (1934) and *In the Steps of St. Paul* (1936) also added to the travel literature of our times and his works

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\* A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

\*\* Ibid.

together with the novels of Evelyn Wange make an interesting reading.

**Q. 99.** Who are the prominent writers of Nature and country life in prose during the 20th Century? Give a brief account of any two of the prominent figures of this species of literature

**Ans.** The writers who have chosen to glorify Nature and country life in their works are many in number, the prominent of them being W. H. Hudson, Edward Thomas, Siegfried Sasson, H. J. Massingham, Sir William Beach Thomas, A. G. Steer, George Sturt, Alison Uttley, Robert Gibbings, Eric Parker, Biluned Lewis and Henry Williamson. We will deal with the work of W. H. Hudson, the great naturalist and Henry Williamson, the writer of wild life in some detail.

**William Henry Hudson (1841—1922)**

William Henry Hudson, the eminent naturalist and romancer and also an essayist was born in the Pampas of La Plata. The remarkable variety of his work makes it difficult to buckle Hudson on the belt of conventional classifications. Yet his endowments have entitled him to a place among the front rank writers of English prose. This unobtrusive and contemplative writer who shunned the drums of publicity and kept a noiseless tenor of his way in the hospitable recesses of the countryside and Nature, which was his 'element', did not produce that popular type of literature that takes a reading world by storm. His recognition was, no wonder, late in coming. But once his works had been read by the public, he found his place in English Literature because he was not only a naturalist and romancer but also a stylist of the first water. His passionate sense of devotion to truth, with his absorption in noting natural phenomena, joined to a supreme power of self-expression, is what enlarges and enriches his special contribution to English Literature. To convey this ecstasy of living, the appreciation of visible beauty in earth, sea and sky, is the finest gift of God to man. It is Hudson's endowment as a writer that he is able to communicate part of his delight and inspiration to lesser men and women,

in a language as moving and pellucid as a crystal stream.

W. H. Hudson has given a vivid account of his life in the Pampas in *Far Away and Long ago* (1918). His love for Nature is seen at his best in *The Naturalist in La Plata* (1892), *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893) and in *Green Mansions* (1904) which is a beautiful account of South American life. Hudson specialised in the study of birds and several of his books deal with birds. Among these books on birds three are significant—*British Birds* (1895), *Birds in London* (1898), *Birds and Man* (1901). Hudson's other works dealing with Nature and countryside are *The Land's End* (1908), *A Shepherd's Life* (1910), *A Traveller In Little Things* (1921) and *A Hind in Richmond Park* (1922)

Hudson was a keen and observant lover of nature. He was 'a patient and solitary watcher of Nature.' He took keen interest in the observation and appreciation of wild life, especially of birds, but in his view, all wild life "was a part of the human scene, and, as his writing advanced, birds, animals, and insects were only one strand on his very detailed picture of English life." His *A Shepherd's Life* is the best of his nature books, and here he takes us to the heart of nature and country life. Hudson took keen delight in everything lovely and beautiful in nature. His delight in life was not "an occasional impulse, but a conviction declared in his works from first to last."

#### Style :

Hudson's writings cast such a spell on men of letters that they found him the most enchanting of modern prose writers. "As a stylist he (Hudson) has few, if any living equals," remarked Galsworthy.\* A. S. Collins also says, "He writes the purest English prose style of the century scientifically precise without jargon, sensitive without aestheticism, concrete and detailed without loss of colour and ease."\*\*

There is a majestic maturity about Hudson's style, which is apparent in almost every book he wrote with the unmistakable seal of his distinctive genius. *Afoot in England* is perhaps the perfect book to choose as an epitome of that style, and to study

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\* Foreword to Hudson's *Far Away And Long Ago* (1918)

\*\* A. S. Collins—English Literature of the Twentieth century.

its attributes of effortless simplicity, piercing insight and imaginative majesty. He has a descriptive charm. He is also a master of delicate, concise and clear style especially in recording his observations. Galsworthy says, "To use words so true and simple, that they oppose no obstacle to the flow of thought and feeling from mind to mind, and yet by juxtaposition of word sounds set up in the recipient continuing emotion or gratification—this is the essence of style; and Hudson's writing has pre-eminently this double quality."

Conrad once remarked that Hudson "writes down his words as the good God makes the green grass to grow, and that is all you will ever find to say about it if you try for ever." His style appears like a slowly attained acquisition as the pigments of a chaffinch or a sun beetle or the grace with which a hartbell grows. Hudson had, of course, the great advantage of being the possessor of an astonishingly uniform style; it is difficult to trace any marked development or decline in the literary craftsmanship of the author. Date of composition means little in any critical consideration of the quality of Hudson's prose. With him there are no object failures to be considerably dismissed from examination with the explanation "apprentice work." Who would be presumptuous enough to pass such a sentence on 'The Purple Land' (1885). And certainly he never afforded that most melancholy of all literary spectacles—the unwitting exhibition of powers in evident decay and decline. The posthumous volume 'A Hind in Richmond Park' (1922) is perhaps the most profound in its philosophy and psychology of the entire series, and it was the work of a man in the eighties.

To sum up in the words of Kessler, "I have been reading Hudson with growing delight. Much as I admire Conrad, Yeats, Hardy and some others, he is to me the greatest living master of noble English. In his simplicity, directness and grace he reminds me of the great Attic writers of prose narrative; his phrase flows with the same exquisite limpidity, every image surging up in its right place and perfect in proportion. Everybody else's style sounds affected in comparison; he does not seem to care how he writes, but to be like the Greeks, naturally



perfect.”\*

**Henry Williamson ( 897—).**

Williamson is another great lover of the countryside and wild life. He wrote a number of books on wild life and the country side. The chief of his works are *The Love Swallows* (1922), *The Old Stage* and *Tarkn the Other*. The last named book is ‘an unrivalled book of its kind.’ Williamson was an artist and whatever emerged from his pen was fastidiously written. His observation of nature was careful and his expression of the charms of nature was sincere. He was strongly opposed to materialism and machine life. He, “felt the disease of modern civilization and was especially conscious of the urban materialism which was antagonistic to the former and therefore to the heart of England.”

**Q. 100. Write a note on the Historical prose and the works of the historians of the 20th Century**

**Ans.** During the twentieth century there has been a rapid growth of historical writing, and many famous historians of the age have brought this kind of prose writing to a very high standard. Some writers have brought a fusion of biography and history in their works. Lytton Strachey’s historical biographies of *Queen Victoria* and the *Eminent Victorians* enter the province of history. Arthur Bryant in his *Charles II* portrayed not only the king but also the age in which gaiety and raillery had reached a high water mark. In his *English Stage* he made a comprehensive survey of English life and history from 1840 to 1890. In his *The Years of Endurance* and *Years of Victory*, he presented the conflict between England and France from 1793 to 1812. G. M. Trevelyan is a great historian of the 20th century and his two remarkable achievements are *History of England* (1926) and *English Social History* (1943). He completed the history of Queen Anne which Macaulay, his great relative, could not complete. G. G. Coulton (1853—1947) was the historian of the Middle Ages and his two remarkable works are *Chaucer and his England* and *Five Centuries of Religion*. He presented a new view of the Middle

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\* Quoted by Samuel J. Looker in *Worthing Cavalcade*, p. 40.

Ages and "with his vast learning robustly countered the idealising Catholic interpretation of the Middle Ages as presented by hesterton." A. L. Rowse (1903—) is an academic historian of the modern age and his *The Spirit Of English History* (1943) is a good work in historical writing. He achieved distinction by producing *The England of Elizabeth* in (1851) "in which, apart from his defective understanding of the religious spirit in individuals, he shows that masterly power of handling history which rings historical writing within the sphere of literature." H. A. Fisher's *History of Europe* (1935), H. Butter Field's *Christianity and History* (1949), Deins Brogan's *The Development of Modern France* (1870—1939) and *The American Problem* are examples of comprehensive historical portrayal of the men and events of these countries.

Among economic historians R. H. Tawney and Barbara Hammod stand out prominently. Constitutional history has been attempted by Sir Maurice Powiche and J. E. Neale.

H. G. Wells and Winston Churchill have been professional academic historians. Sir James Frazer and A. J. Toynbee are other remarkable historians of the modern age and they have been endowed with originality and brilliance. Frazer was scientific and Toynbee is philosophical in his approach to history. Frazer's (1854—1931) *The Golden Bough* is a great work of history. It is stupendous in its scope. It presents "a massive accumulation of well sifted knowledge of ancient civilizations and primitive societies, their religions, myths and legends, from which theologians, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, students of the classics and creative writers could all draw valuable material." Toynbee in his *A Study of History* in six volumes studied the entire history of ancient civilizations and by a study of the rise and fall of previous civilizations he sought to deduce a comprehensive philosophy of history. Toynbee's outlook is religious and he gives us the warning that if the forces of militarism and materialism continue to advance with the stupendous speed with which they are going apace, the day is not far off when the whole fabric of civilization will topple down and once again man will relapse to the old days of barbarism and primitivism. We must listen to the voice of these great historians

and formulate our lives in the light of their observation about civilization and human society.

**Q. 101. Give a brief account of the Scientific and philosophic Literature of the 20th Century.**

**Ans.** There has been a phenomenal growth of scientific and philosophic literature during the 20th century. Many scientists of our times can favourably be compared with such Victorian giants as Huxley, Darwin and Tyndall. The impact of modern science has been palpably felt in all branches of life and learning. "The impact of the new science fell particularly on religion and ethics, but its effects extended to every sphere, especially in the rapidly developing study of sociology, and the practical bearing of the new science upon society demanded consideration."\*

Among the modern scientists A. N. Whitehead (1861—1947) occupies a distinctive place. He was a mathematician and a leading exponent of the philosophic approach. His main works are *The Concept of Nature* (1920), *The Principle of Relativity* (1922), *Science and the Modern World* (1926), *Process and Reality* (1929). Sir James Jeans (1877—1946) attracted attention by his widely read books—*The Universe Around Us* (1929) and *The Mysterious Universe* (1930). In these books Jeans has given an interesting view of the heavens and the planets and his style of presentation is lucid and clear. He can be easily followed for he seeks to unfold the picture of the sun, and the universe in an interesting manner. Sir Arthur Eddington (1882—1944), mathematician, physicist and astronomer, produced great works like *The Nature of Physical World* (1928), *Science and the Unseen World* (1929) and *The Expanding Universe* (1933). Julian Huxley (1877—) the great biologist, wrote fine essays on scientific subjects and he is rightly popular by his *Essays of a Biologist* (1923), *Essays in a Popular Science* (1926), *Man in the Modern World* (1947). He also collaborated with H. G. Wells and his son G. P. Wells in the production of *The Science of Life* (1929) *Soviet Genetics and World Science* (1949). Huxley is a thorough going materialist and does not believe in God as the controller

**Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.**

and ruler of the world. He also has little faith in the immortality of the soul and religious salvation through Nirvana. J. B. S. Haldane (1892—) made notable contribution to the world of scientific literature by writing, *Possible Worlds* (1927), *Science and Ethics* (1928), *The Causes of Evolution* (1933) and *Science and Everyday Life* (1939). Lancelot Hogben (1895) a biologist like Huxley and Haldane produced two great works *Mathematics for the Million* (1936), and *Science for the Citizen* (1939). Besides these prominent writers on the subject of science, we have in the 20th century a host of other scientific writers, the chief of them being F. Hoyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Richard Gregory, Sir Arthur Keith and J. D. Bernal.

Among the philosophical and scientific writers of the 20th century, **Bertrand Russell** (1872—) occupies a very high place. He is a scientist, mathematician, philosopher and political thinker of the highest order. He is the author of a number of valuable works, the chief of them being :—

1. Philosophical Essays (1910).
2. Problems of Philosophy (1911)
3. Principles of Social Reconstruction (1917).
4. Mysticism and Logic (1918).
5. Roads to Freedom (1918).
6. Our Knowledge of the External World (1919).
7. An Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy (1919)
8. The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism (1920).
9. The Analysis of Mind (1921).
10. The Problem of China (1922).
11. The Prospects of Industrial Civilization (1923).
12. On Education (1926).
13. An Outline of Philosophy (1927).
14. Why I Am Not a Christian (1927).
15. Marriage and Moral (1929).
16. Conquest of Happiness (1930).
17. The Scientific Outlook (1931).
18. Education and the Social Order (1932).
19. Freedom and Organisation (1934).
20. Power, A New Social Analysis (1934).
21. A History of Western Philosophy (1934).
22. An Enquiry into the Meaning of Truth (1934).
23. Human Knowledge : Its Scope and Limits (1948)
24. Authority and the Individual (1949).
25. Unpopular Essays (1950).

Russell is one of those writers who has not yet been properly understood. His unorthodox opinions have been acclaimed by free thinkers as a great advance in modern thought, while the same opinions have been condemned by others as the

result of his confused thinking on vital and important issues of life. Hence while in certain quarters his books have been hailed as a valuable contribution to the solution of the world's complex problems, in others they have been received with utmost protest and indignation. In spite of all these differences about his works it has been agreed among critics that Russell has always been inspired by the love of truth in his investigations. As the *Times Literary Supplement* once said, he has "a way of asking right question and making the people think hard about them, whether they accept his solutions of these questions or not." It will be interesting, therefore, to examine his views a little critically and see what panacea he offers for the ills of this troubled passionate planet.

Russell is dissatisfied with the present state of our society. He has found that there is something radically wrong with modern life. He has been deeply afflicted to note the hypocrisy, falsehood, and injustice prevailing in our society. The capitalistic system of society with its complete hold on the labourers, who have been denied all leisure and happiness by the capitalists, has mortified Russell. War and violence in modern international life have equally touched the heart of this great thinker. The system of modern education with numerous defects in our university life has equally stirred the thoughts of Russell. He has given considerable thought to the solution of these various maladies of our social and economic life. He is primarily concerned with the destruction and elimination of these evils.

Russell equally advocates *Socialism*, as the panacea of all our economic and political maladies. His ideas about socialism are not very clear, but we can derive some of his ideas about socialism by reading the essay "The world as it could be made." He is against *communism* with its plan and programme of wholesale change in society.

The style and manner of expression in Russell's essays evoke our applause. This is a prose extraordinarily logical and effortless, marked by constant flashes of wit and insight. It is at the same time characterised by "an almost native simplicity, crystal clarity, a calm Olympian irony and a gift for compressed epigrammatic statement." He has the gift of summing up a very

complex situation in a few, clear and simple words and sentences. Mr. Dilip Kumar Roy\* expressed great appreciation for Russell's power in expressing his thought economically with restraint. Russell learnt this art with great effort, and he told Mr. Roy in his talks with him that when he was a boy he used to "toy with different ideas to see in how few words I could express them." But with his terseness, there is no dryness as we notice in Bacon's writings. He gives a touch of sprightliness and gaiety to his treatment of even abstruse subjects. His early essays have a lyrical grace, which we do not find in his later works.

**Q. 102. Write a note on the Literary Critics of the 20th Century and their works.**

**Ans.** Twentieth century is rich in literary criticism. There are many celebrated and reputed critics of our times and some of them at least such as T. S. Eliot, George Saintsbury, Walter Raleigh, Oliver Elton, Courthope will be recognised by posterity as the most remarkable figures of twentieth century criticism. "If none has the stature of a Dryden or a Jonson, a Lamb or a Hazlitt, several have done invaluable work for their contemporaries by advancing the understanding and appreciation of literature."\*\* The following are the main literary critics of our age :  
**Arthur Symons.**

Symons, the poet, is a literary critic of repute and his studies in the poetry of Blake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti have done much to popularise the works of these two poets. Symons's *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* (1910) is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Romantic poets. His other famous books of criticism are *Baudelaire* (1920), *Hardy* (1927) and *Walter Pater* (1932). Symons popularised the French symbolist movement in English poetry by his famous work *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).

Arthur Symons is an impressionistic critic. His works of criticism seem to be prose poems. T. S. Eliot considers him to be an imperfect critic. Symons continues the tradition of Walter

\* Dilip K. Roy : Among the Great.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the Twentieth Century.

Pater. He is not a very scientific critic yet he has rare capacity of losing himself in a work of art. He is also remarkable for his extremely poetical style. His remarks about Shelley are better worth reading than some of Shelley's own poems. His criticism has all the defects of impressionistic criticism. But it has its own virtues; it is most interesting to read and it is more creative than critical.

**A. C. Bradley (1851—1935).**

Bradley will be known to posterity for his famous *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) and *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909). In *Shakespearean Tragedy* he makes a scholarly and critical survey of the principal tragedies of Shakespeare, and in the *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* he gives us his views on poetry and much illuminating information on poets like Robert Bridges. Bradley is an authority on Shakespeare's tragedies and if Shakespeare was reborn, he would need the help of Bradley to understand his former works.

Dr. F. R. Leavis seems to criticise Dr. Bradley without much justification. Leavis has started almost a reaction against Dr. Bradley. The main objection of modern critics against him is that he does not precede with induction. Prof. Humphry House objects to his method of determining the character of a Shakespearean hero. Following the foot steps, Prof. L. C. Knight also seems to be reacting against the Bradley tradition. But it will have to be said that Dr. Bradley has his own charms and it would be difficult to surpass him in his Shakespearean criticism.

**Sir Walter Raleigh (1861—1922).**

Raleigh will be remembered by his *English Novel* (1898) *Milton* (1900), *Wordsworth* (1903), *Shakespeare* (1907) and *Six Essays on Johnson* (1910). Raleigh is a master of his subject and his manner of presentation is extremely lucid and clear. Raleigh continues the eclectic criticism of the Victorian Age. He has nothing of the charms of modern criticism and he is essentially a traditionalist. But he has none of the defects of modern criticism. He has no theory to propound; he does not belong to any group; he does not write any particular type of criticism; he is not very technical. His criticism is not analytical like that of T. S. Eliot or F. R. Leavis. He expresses his views with conviction and clarity.

W. P. Ker (1855—1923).

Ker will go down in history as a scholarly critic. His famous works are *Epic and Romance* (1897), *The Dark Ages* (1904), *Essays on Medieval Literature* (1905), *The Art of Poetry* (1923) and *Form and Style in Poetry* (1928).

George Saintsbury (1845—1933).

Saintsbury is a great name in the world of literary criticism. He was a great scholar and a man of immense learning. He had two passions in life—love for wine and love for literature. His monumental works are *Elizabethan Literature* (1887), *History of English Prose* (1906—10), *History of English Criticism* (1911), *History of European Criticism* (1912), *The Peace of the Agustans* (1916), *History of English Prose Rhythm and English Novel*.

Prof. Saintsbury is not a scientific critic. His criticism is remarkable for its rare charm of scholarship and style. Dr. D. Daiches compares him with Mr. T. S. Eliot and says that Saintsbury concentrates on personal responses whereas Mr. Eliot concentrates on the text itself. Dr. Daiches says, "If we sat beside Saintsbury's discussion of prior one of T. S. Eliot's earlier critical essays..... We are struck at once with the complete difference in temper. Eliot is not concerned to talk with wit and urbanity about literary achievement on which his readers are largely in agreement... Eliot's object is to explore the literary work in order to show what goes on in it."

The most remarkable thing about Prof. Saintsbury is his confidence in his readers, a quality which Mr. Eliot does not possess. Prof. Saintsbury was a very great scholar and he knew almost all the European languages. His love of learning had a match only in his love of drinking. He read immensely and he had prolific memory. He read so much that words and sentences from other authors came up to his mind unconsciously. It has humorously been said that Prof. Saintsbury's prose style is like a fine pudding in which the material used is not his own. He was a man of very strong tastes and he could speak very authentically about things without injuring the sensibilities of his readers.

Criticising Arnold, he says :—

"With bricks of ignorance and mortar of assumption you



cannot build a critical house."

Similarly when he praised an author, he praised him in the most forceful language. This is what he says of Shelley, "The worst utterance of Shelley is better worth-reading than the best panegyric of his commentators."

Certain attempts have been made in the recent times to associate Prof. Saintsbury with the art for art's sake movement. It is true that in the sphere of criticism, he falls nearer to Pater than to Arnold. But he has something of his own which can not be explained by a common place people.

**G. K. Chesterton (1874—1936).**

Chesterton is known by his *Browning*, *The Victorian Age in Literature*, *Dickens* and *Chaucer*. Often diffuse, he can be pointed and penetrating when he writes with force and fervour.

He is not at all a scientific critic and he is too subjective to be accurate. His Dickens is Chestertonian Dickens. Yet he is interesting to read he is never dull and you cannot but enjoy all that which he has to say.

**Sir Arthur Quiller Couch (1863—1944)**

Quiller Couch, Professor of English Literature at Cambridge in 1912 is a critic of distinction. He published many volumes of stimulating literary appreciation and criticism which were originally given in the form of lectures. His main works are *Studies in Literature* (Three Series 1918, 1922, 1929), *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (1918), *Or the Art of Reading* (1920). "His pages talk to the reader just as their author spoke to his audiences, arousing interest in and liking for his subject by the genial humanity of his treatment and the free use of illustrative question. humanistic, insisting on the intimate connection between literature and life between books and their authors."

**Sir Edmund Gosse (1848—1928).**

Gosse's main works in criticism are *From Shakespeare to Pope* (1885), and *A History of Eighteenth Century Literature* (1889). His observation are sound and substantial.

**J. Middleton Murry (1889—)**

Murry is a romantic critic and represents the 'best contemporary example of the dithyrambic tendency in romantic criticism. He identifies himself with the subject of his criticism, and views

the work from the view point of its creator. He is at his best in his famous work *Keats and Shakespeare* (1925). His study of D. H. Lawrence is well brought out in *Son of Woman* (1931).

**Lacheverell Sitwell (1897—)**

He is an impressionistic critic. His impression "is more informed and less idiosyncratic than that of Murry." He spent much energy in studying baroque and neoclassical art. For this enterprise he had "a distinguished sensibility and sympathy and a style that is as responsible to the bush exuberance of the baroque as to the correctness and restraint of the classical." His main work is *Southern Baroque Art* (1924).

**Lascelles Abercrombie** won reputation by his *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925), *Romanticism* (1926), *Thomas Hardy*. **Oliver Elton** is well known by his *English Muse* (1933) and his massive but readable work *Survey of English Literature from 1730 to 1880* in six volumes. **Sir Herbert Grierson** is famous for his *Cross Currents in the Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, *Milton and Wordsworth* and *Metaphysical Poetry*. **R. W. Chambers** produced his monumental work *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (1942) in which he presents master minds from Shakespeare to A. E. Housman in a scholarly manner. This book is the fruit of years of loving scholarship. **E. K. Chamber's** *Shakespeare: A Survey* (1925), *The Medieval Stage* (1903) and *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923) are well known works of which the first on Shakespeare is noted for its scholarship and authoritative handling of the plays. The interest in Shakespearean criticism continued unabated and many critics came forward with their masterly studies of Shakespeare's plays. The chief among the Shakespearean critics are **G. B. Harrison** (1894) whose biographical and critical account of Shakespeare is commendable, **John Palmer** (1885—1944) whose criticism of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson is sound, **Wilson Knight** (1897—) who produced the *Wheel of Fire* and studied Shakespeare's tragedies; **H. B. Charlton** (1890—) whose study of *Shakespeare's Comedies* is an admirable work. To these works should be added the critical writings of **Professor Dover Wilson** who is noted for his *The Essential Shakespeare* (1932) *What Happens in Hamlet* (1935) and **Moulton** who is

known by his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*.

Tillyard's study of Milton opens a new chapter in Miltonic criticism. Sir Maurice Bowra appealed to the literary public by *The Heritage of Symbolism* (1943), *From Virgil to Milton* (1945) and *The Creative Experiment* (1949), Basil Willey in his *Seventeenth Century Background* and *The Eighteenth Century Background* (1940) and *Nineteenth Century Studies* (1949), "traced the relationship between the currents of thought in the age and the creative writings of that age, and was luminous to scholars." Lord David Cecil is known by his admirable study of *Thomas Hardy*, and *Early Victorian Novelists and Poets and Story Tellers*. C K Ogden published *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), *The Principle of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Poetry Criticism* (1929), and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1930). I. A. Richards is a great name in modern criticism and he is well known for his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), and *Practical Criticism*, (1929). He advocated the psychological and analytical approach in the appreciation of a work of art. In his hands Pegasus became a dray-horse pulling a psychological load. "He was primarily concerned with analyzing the elements involved in the process of comprehending a work of art, and secondly, with relating aesthetic value to the theory of value generally." His two followers are William Empson and F R Leavis. William Empson (1906— ) in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) advanced the analytical criticism of Richards and his book presents, "a subtle analysis of the various layers and shades of meaning which can exist in a statement and the appreciation of which is essential to the proper apprehension of the total statement, especially in poetry." F. R. Leavis was the editor of the distinguished critical journal, *Scrutiny* to which a number of budding literary critics have made vital contribution. Leavis's main works are *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), *Revaluation* (1947), in which he vigorously pleaded for the rehabilitation of the literary reputation of Marvell, Pope and Emile Bronte, *The Great Tradition* (1948) in which he set out the excellence of George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad, *The Common Pursuit* (1952) which is a nice collection of the articles published from time to time in *Scrutiny*.

Dr. Leavis is a man of very strong tastes. He loves clarity, solidity and hardness. He does not like the romantic vagueness in criticism or creation. He is an analytical critic and does not believe in making sweeping generalisations. Leaving perhaps Mr. T. S. Eliot, he is the greatest living critic. He is a man who would not yield since he is so sure of his being right. He has done as much to rehabilitate Pope and Marvell as any other critic. The strength of his convictions can be seen in his evaluation of Milton and Shelley. He criticises both these poets severely. You may disagree with Dr. Leavis but you cannot possibly afford to ignore him. He has done to literary criticism what Mr. Eliot has done to English poetry. Dr. Leavis wants matter of fact, precise and concrete criticism. He does not love mere jugglery of words. The criticism that indulges in such devices is likely to receive a severe blow from him. He considers Mr. Eliot to be a great critic, but he was not afraid of taking him to task when Mr. Eliot revised his opinion about Milton.

Among his followers may be named Prof. L. C. Knights and Dr. Daiches. Prof. L. C. Knights shows the same preciseness of expression and the same hard brilliance as Dr. Leavis. But he is not as great a critic as Dr. Leavis, nor does he have the depth and scholarship of that frustrated Cambridge scholar. Dr. Daiches has written quite a good number of books and in most of them he follows the Cambridge tradition headed by Dr. Leavis. His various publications include, *An Introduction to Literature*, *Robert Burns*, *Milton*, *The Present Age*, *Literary Essays*, *Critical Approaches to Literature* and *A Critical History of English Literature*. He is at his best in Milton and at his worst perhaps in his *History of English Literature*. In Milton the analytical bent is more pronounced and his statements have an air of strong conviction about them; whereas his *History of English Literature* is a collection of too many sweeping generalisations put forward in an artificially redundant language. Yet he is one of the major living critics and should be congratulated for restoring Yeats to his proper place.

Mention should also be made of the Marxist critics. Christopher Caudwell is the most outstanding Marxist critic. His *Illusion and Reality* is a remarkable study of English poetry from

the Marxian point of view. His other publications are *Studies in a Dying Culture*, and *More Studies in a Dying Culture*. He died at a very early age, yet his contribution is quite outstanding. Ralph Fox contributed much by writing a Marxian history of the English Novel in his *The Novel and the People*.

A strange mixture of Marxism and spiritualism is to be seen in Mr. D. S. Savage's books. His *The Absolute Principle* is a difficult book. He is almost savagian in his criticism of the modern novelists.

Among the critics who do not belong to any school or class or tradition, mention should be made of Mr. F. L. Lucas. Mr. Lucas wields a beautiful and charming style and his criticism is most interesting to read. He criticizes the ancients and the moderns, the romantics and the classicists in the same breath. An under-current of subtle and scholarly humour runs through all his critical works. His publications include, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, *Literature and Psychology*, *Tragedy* and *Ten Victorian Poets*.

In the sphere of dramatic criticism, Professor Nicoll still stands unsurpassed. He is an authority in drama and his studies of English and European dramatic literature are most remarkable achievements. Professor Raymond Williams, William Archer and G. Barker are other contemporary dramatic critics.

Sir Herbert Read made a notable contribution to the psychological approach to literature in his study of Wordsworth in *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism* (1951) and *The Voice of Feeling* (1953). Read's role as a critic mainly lies in his attempt 'to wed the psychological to the aesthetic in criticism.' Cecil Day Lewis's *The Poetic Image* (1947) is a nice work on poetic imagery. Edmund Blunden's biographical studies of *Charles Lamb and his Contemporaries*, *The Life of Leigh Hunt* and *Shelley* are nice works of art and criticism. Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader* (1925), in two volumes, gives a new interpretation to the psychological novel and equally well sets out to recreate the literary figures from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century. Her *The Death of the Moth* (1944) shows her interlinking of life and literature. E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) is an outstanding work in understanding different aspects of the novel.

such as plot and character, and their relative importance in works of fiction.

Mrs. Virginia Woolf and Mr. E. M. Forster belong to what is known as the *Bloomsbury Group*. It is doubtful if the Bloomsbury tradition still continues. Perhaps Mr. Cyrill Connolly can be classed with them but he shows an altogether different trends of mind in his *The Enemies of Promise*. Courthope's *History of English Poetry* in six volumes is a monumental work in criticism, and to this criticism of English poets and poetry must be added Grierson and Smith's book *A Critical History of English Poetry*.

#### T. S. Eliot (1888—1965)

T. S. Eliot is one of the greatest figures in the history of literary criticism during the 20th century. His criticism of poetry, drama, art and society is based on a coherent series of principles evolved from time to time. "He has thought himself in a consistent view about literature ; as a critic, he brings carefully sharpened tools to each fresh task of literary judgment."\* Eliot owed his inspiration as a critic to the movement in American criticism called the movement of Humanism led by Professor Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. "This movement, a modern variety of neoclassicism hostile to both the romantic and the realistic movements in literature called for a return to classical standards in criticism and for the measurement for modern literature on the scale of the classics." Inspired by the protagonists of this new wave of Humanism, Eliot also modelled his critical principles and judgments on the line of the Humanists and his critical position in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) is practically the same as that of the humanists. Eliot was also for classicism and tradition, and stood against the tide of romantic criticism which he characterised as fragmentary, immature and chaotic. He felt that discipline, order, sanity, form were once again to be imposed and reintroduced in the field of literary criticism. Eliot went a few steps ahead of American humanism and advanced on fresh line of adjudging and evaluating works of art.

Eliot upheld 'tradition,' but he did not mean that tradition-

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\* R. A. Scott—Fifty Years of English Literature.

alists should slavishly imitate the ancients and have nothing new of their own. Eliot simply emphasised on the writers of his age to keep in view the past heritage of literature and literary criticism while composing their own works. The present should not cut itself off from all considerations of the past. In Eliot's view—

“The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer, and within it the whole of the literature of his own country, has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”

For T. S. Eliot Literature is a continuous process in which the past, present, and future are one whole. He expresses his faith in the continuity of time and literature. In *Burnt Norton* he writes :

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.*

Thus Eliot's position as a critic is to synthesise the present with the past and to co-relate the future to the present and take a synoptic view of whole literary production. In his view, the function of the critic is to co-relate literature to the whole current of conscious creative effort.' The critic has to keep in view the past 'tradition' and current 'convention.' Eliot failed to appreciate Blake for he found the eighteenth century mystic poet lacking “in a frame work of accepted and traditional ideas.”

T. S. Eliot can be considered as a Classicist re stating the claims of classicism in its demand for order, poise and right reason.

In general his conception of literature was a classical one placing a high value on tradition, on content and form.

It is one of the peculiar excellences of T. S. Eliot that his own work in the field of creation is governed by his principles. There is a conformity between what he preaches or professes and what he actually creates. His criticism is not divorced from his poetic activity. In his case the critic and the creative artist are frequently the same person. We can better appreciate his early

poetry by studying his remarks in *The Metaphysical Poets*.

T. S. Eliot is at his best when he is writing on Dryden, Dante, Metaphysical poets, Post-Elizabethan dramatists. His sympathies are with Dryden and Donne. His appreciation of Milton,\* Blake and Shelley is at best reluctant and partial. Of the moderns, his criticism is less impressive. In *After Strange Gods* (1934) he is very severe on James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Catherine Mansfield. "His spiritual position compelled them to denounce them as heretics."

Eliot co-related social and literary criticism. In this respect, he resembles Matthew Arnold who was a critic both of life and letters. He is of the view that arts are the by-products of society, and "that good prose cannot be written by a people without convictions."

His critical style resembles that of Matthew Arnold particularly in the use of analysis, definition and comparison. There is, however, a note of difference between Eliot and Arnold. While Eliot wields Arnold's tone of authority he does not suffer from the repetitions and mannered approach of Arnold.

The critical writings of T. S. Eliot are to be found in *The Sacred Wood*. (1920), *Selected Essays* (1932), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934). His two other important works are *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes on the Definition of a Culture* (1948).

**Q. 103. Write an Essay on the modern Short Story and Short Story writers.**

**Ans.** The popularity of the short story in our times can be gauged by the publication of a number of short stories in books and magazines. Many authors have taken to short-story writing,

H. G. Wells defined the short story as "any piece of prose fiction that can be read in more than twenty minutes." Sedgewick said that a short story is like a horse race in which the beginning and the end count the most. But it will be seen that none of

\* He charged Milton with bringing about "dissociation of sensibility" which weakened English poetry in times to come.



these definitions are adequate. H. G. Wells's definition applies to scores of short stories but it fails miserably when applied to, say, Tolstoy's *Family Happiness*. For Sedgewick, the editor, it is the beginning and the end only that count. They cancel each other out. Sir Walpole's demand that a short story must be full of action is a perfect answer to those who like whisky, but it fails on application to the short stories of Turgenev or James. Mr. Bates suggests that a short story is what its author decides it to be.

The history of the short story is both very long and very short. From one point of view the story of Cain and Abel in the *Genesis* is a short story. From another point of view the story has no history prior to the nineteenth century. The short story, in fact, as we know it today, cannot be said to have begun with Gogol and Edgar Allen Poe. Among the other important nineteenth century short story writers, we may name Maupassant for France, Turgenev and Chekhov for Russia, O' Henry for America. No figure stands out from the nineteenth century English scene in the sphere of short story writing. The reason is not far to seek. Suggestion and subtleness are the most important and essential ingredients of a short story; whereas the nineteenth century English prose fiction is marked by a heavy style and a tendency to moralize everything. It was under such circumstances that the short story could not flourish in the nineteenth century England. It was only with the advent of 1880's that the short story proper came to be recognised and practised in England. The names that now stand out are those of R. L. Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling and Oscar Wilde. R. L. Stevenson is remarkable for his fine poetic moralism, and Oscar Wilde for his brilliant paradoxical style.

Kipling was primarily a journalist and he succeeded very well in this sphere since the short story demands speed and action above all. The belief that he was a great writer is a myth. But he did quite a lot to make the short story in England move faster than ever. His *Puck of Pook's Hill* was published in 1908. He, with H. G. Wells, remains the connecting link between the short story writers of the nineteenth and the present century.

H. G. Wells wrote scientific stories. The greatest achieve-

ment of Wells lies in the fact that he makes his readers believe all that he has to say. He is a romancer talking in the language of scientific power and reform. His genius can be defined as a combination of Dickens and Poe. It has been said that he lacks artistic finish, and the objection seems to be true.

The most outstanding work in this field was done by A. E. Coppard and Katherine Mansfield. They brought poetry to the English short story for the first time and their reputation rests mainly on their short stories. The short stories of A. E. Coppard have the flavour of poetry. His short stories are remarkable for their poetic realism. He became well known with his collection of stories called *Adam and Eve and Pinch-ole*. Coppard had a theory that a short story is something meant to be told; and he is a remarkable teller of tales. He had a strong sense of the comic and the tragic as can be seen in his stories like *The Higgler* and *The Black Dog*. He published numerous volumes of short stories *The Black* (1923), *The Field Mustard* (1926) and *Dunky Fallow* (1933) etc. Later on under the influence of Joyce, he became obsessed with his own voice and his art declined.

Katherine Mansfield stands apart among the English short story writers. Her reputation rests mainly on a single volume called *The Garden Party*. Mansfield writes like a poet, and feels intensely like a child. She was considerably influenced by J. Chekhov. She picks up a moment from the life of an ordinary man and writes about it in a very poetic language. Her short stories reveal stream of consciousness technique in its miniature form. She is not a moralist and she presents only that which she has seen herself. Her short stories have the delicacy of a rose and the charm of a lyric about them. She presents her characters sympathetically, but character building was never her job. She leaves much undone and we have to enjoy as much what is *left in* as what is *left out*. "Katherine Mansfield's human scene is not a wide one."† Her other collections are : *Something Childish* and *The Dove's Nest*.

The success of these authors, the decline of poetry and the rise of various magazines and periodicals, encouraged various

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† A. S. Collins : 20th Century Literature.

other short story writers. They were further encouraged by the success of Galsworthy and W. Somerset Maugham. Galsworthy's short stories are remarkable for their sympathetic rendering of the characters from the lower strata of society. Galsworthy is not a very great craftsman but he is remarkable for his compassion such as may be seen in stories like *Quality*. But, Somerset Maugham has nothing of that compassion. He writes like Maupassant, (whom he considers to be the greatest short story writer of the world). Maugham is like a lawyer, and his short stories are as objective as the report of a court case.

A major contribution has been made in this field by the Irish authors. Sean O' Flaherty did a great deal to popularize the short story. His *The Untilled Field* is a remarkable collection of short stories. His short stories are poetic and delicate. But he left short story writing very soon: so much a loss to the short story which he popularized as much as Maupassant. Among his followers are Mr. Sean O' Faolain and Mr. Frank O' Connor. Faolain has been influenced by J. Chekhov and Turgenev, and his collection called *The Midsummer Night Madness* contains stories of Irish life. Faolain derives much of his inspiration from the rich folk tradition of Ireland. Frank O' Connor's stories are not as those of Faolain, but they are remarkable in their own way. O' Connor is more objective than Faolain and shows an indebtedness to Maupassant.

Contemporaneous with the Irish Renaissance, we have the American Renaissance brought about by Sherwood Anderson. The American short story sank down after Stephen Crane. It was reduced to a mechanical formula. *Sherwood Anderson* revived it afresh and taught the American writers to come into a closer contact with the life of their own people.

Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio* is a remarkable achievement and it contains short stories that have a rare charm about them. Sherwood Anderson exercised almost an immediate influence. Earnest Hemingway came out with his *In Our Time* which is a collection of beautiful short stories. Hemingway cuts out a whole forest of virtuosity and makes the short story shorter still. The world of his short stories is a world of crime, lust, duels, passions and darkness. But he succeeds in depicting that world most

unmistakably.

Coming back to England, we have D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster. Joseph Conrad's short stories are remarkable for their fine, soft poetic realism and a certain sense of mystery. They are essentially the short stories of a romantic author. E. M. Forster's collection of six short stories, *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911) is another individual experiment.

More remarkable than both of them is D. H. Lawrence who published his *The Prussian Officer* in 1914. Lawrence was too much of an individualist. He eschewed technical limitations. He was bent upon breaking the rules when he wrote Novels. But he could, fortunately, control his insensible technique while writing short stories. His *Modern Lover* and *Love Among the Haystacks* are remarkable pieces. He is sensuous, poetic and charming. His stories smell of earth and the smell is a delightful one.

Now, we have various short story writers. It would be difficult to even mention all of them.

H. E. Bates is, however, the most outstanding name from the contemporary scene. By 1934, he had published two volumes, *Day's England*, *The Black Boxer*. He shows less originality and strength than A. E. Coppard. He is remarkable for his harmoniously poetic style. His stories have humour, no doubt ; but it stops short of the truly comic. But as suggested by Dr. Collins even if there was nothing else, "his pictures of the novels and fields, farms and roads, would still show his mastery of setting : it is lively and loving in its details."

As has been said, many writers deserve to be named alongside Bates, but it must suffice to add the names of Henry Williamson for his achievement in this field with his stories of birds and beasts, T. F. Powys with his stories of the country side and Rhys Davies with his short stories of the Irish fishing coast. The name of Miss Elizabeth Bowen, however, deserves a special mention since she has popularized the short story, through her various illuminating articles on the art of short story. She generally writes about the lives of artists and painters, and her portraits are remarkable for their poetic realism.

Mention must also be made of the Indian Short Story writers writing in English. Since the death of the Kipling-myth,

Indian writers have come forward with the realistic pictures of the life of their own people. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand's short stories are remarkable for their sympathetic treatment of the underdogs. R.K. Narayan shows a rare-craftsmanship. The name of Bhabhani Bhattacharya and K. A. Abbas should also be mentioned. Among the younger writers, the name of Ruksin Bond deserves mention. We have no space to deal with them in detail, and so we must pass silently by.

Literary history is a warning against prophecies. Yet we can safely assert that the future of the short story is immense, without going to the extent of saying that it will oust the novel. But it is a fact that it has compelled the novel to its size. The numerous magazines and the rise of the film industry have gone a long way to help the short story flourish amazingly.

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## **Twentieth Century Drama**

**Q. 104.** What were the factors responsible for the emergence of drama as a powerful literary force during the twentieth century ?

**Ans.** The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of drama, which had been neglected by the Victorian poets and dramatists, as a powerful literary force. All the conditions operating against the blossoming of Drama during the Victorian age were gradually removed, and more and more interest was taken by actors, playgoers, and theatre managers in popularising drama and making it a force to reckon with in the field of literature. As time passed, new trends were introduced in drama and every effort was made by dramatists to make drama life-like, realistic, and appealing to the common man. The moral taboos imposed on drama by the priggish Victorians were also removed and dramatists were at ease in producing once again comedies of manners, which had enjoyed their heyday during the Restoration period. The vogue for comedies was once again introduced in the wake of the social changes and democratic freedom that came with the new century. The new social problems rising in the new set up of values cried for solution, and drama seemed to be a fitting medium in which justice could be done in solving the social and economic problems of the times. The modern dramatist took his task seriously and gave a new outlook to drama, which it had not seen in the Victorian age.

Recounting the emergence of drama as a powerful force in our times J. W. Marriot writes in *The Modern Drama*—"It is possible to account for the miracle that happened ? There is no single explanation, but we can discern a dozen or more contributory factors all of which seem significant. There has been a gradual disappearance of the ancient prejudice against theatre going, a welcome relaxation of the censorship, a steady rise in standards of judgment, due to the spread of education, an increas-

ing margin of leisure in the life of the ordinary man and woman, a deepening conviction that a certain amount of recreation is the natural right of every human being, and the remarkable competence in the theatre for amusement. We have to recognize the influence of the new producer with his theories of drama as a composite art—a synthesis of all arts. The arrival of the new scenic artist and the stage, electrician has revolutionised production. But the greatest factor of all is undoubtedly the change in the dramatist himself. The modern dramatist takes the drama seriously. His purpose is the interpretation of life and playwriting has become an art as well as a craft.”\*

**Q. 105. Write a short essay on the main characteristics and features of twentieth century drama.**

**Ans.** Drama, which had suffered a steep decline during the Victorian Age was revived with great gusto in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the course of six decades has witnessed many trends and currents in the twentieth century drama.

**Realism.**

Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern drama. The dramatists of early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with real problems of life in a realistic technique in their plays. “The post-war generation of men and women started the demand for reality above all things. They demanded that dramatists should show them ‘life,’ as if living itself were not sufficiently intense for them. The theatre was not an escape for them.”\*\*

It was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who popularised realism in modern drama. He dealt with the problems of real life in a realistic manner in his plays. His example was followed by Robertson, Jones, Pinero, Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw in their plays. In the dramas of these realists we get glimpses of real life, with all its warts and sordid ugliness. They deal with problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife

\* J. W. Marriott—The Modern Drama.

\*\* Sir Cedric Hardwicke—The Drama Tomorrow.

between capital and labour and use the theatre as a means for bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in their days.

Modern drama has developed the *Problem Play*, and there are many modern dramatists who have written a number of Problem Plays in our times. Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy are the writers who have given a spurt to problem plays. In their hands the "problem plays became a powerful and effective medium of social criticism, and generally vindicated the right of the individual to shape his life and destiny, unfettered by the prejudices and conventions of society. It dramatised the conflict of ideas and social attitudes, and upheld the principles of equality, freedom and justice. The problem play was a new experiment in form and technique, and dispensed with the conventional devices and expedients of the theatre."\*

#### Play of Ideas.

Modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is employed by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they seek to propagate in society. The modern drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age. "With the treatment of actual life the drama became more and more a drama of ideas, sometimes veiled in the main action, sometimes didactically set forth."\*\*

#### Romanticism.

The earlier dramatists of the twentieth century were Realists to the core, but the passage of time brought in new trends in modern drama. Romanticism, which had been very dear to Elizabethan dramatists found its way in modern drama, and it was mainly due to Sir J. M. Barrie's effort that the new wave of romanticism swept over modern drama for some years of the twentieth century. Barrie kept aloof from sordid and squalid realities of life and made excursions into the world of romance fantasy, magic and super-naturalism in such plays as *Mary Rose*, *Peter Pan*, *A Kiss for Cinderella*, *Admirable Crichton* and *Dear Brutus*. He charmed his readers by the tender whimsicality of

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\* Dr. R. C. Gupta—The Problem Play.

\*\* A. Nicoll—British Drama.



his imagination: and provided them an escape from the drab and dull realities of life.

#### Poetic Plays.

Another reaction to realism and naturalism in drama was evinced in the popularisation of poetic plays by a host of dramatists who have produced poetic plays in large numbers. T. S. Eliot espoused the cause of poetic plays against the realistic prose drama of the modern age. He stated, "I believe that poetry is the natural and complete medium for drama and the verse play is capable of something much more intense and exciting."

Among those who gave an impetus to poetic drama in our times the names of Stephen Phillips, J. E. Flecker, John Drinkwater, John Masefield, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Christopher Fry are worthy of special mention. They have made poetic plays a force to reckon with in modern drama.

#### Historical and Biographical Plays.

Another trend perceptible in modern drama is in the direction of using history and biography for dramatic treatment. There are many beautiful historical and biographical plays in modern dramatic literature. Shaw's *Cæsar and Cleopatra* and *St. Joan* are historical plays of great importance. Ervine wrote *The Lady of Belmont* and popularised the old historical characters in Shakespeare's plays. John Drinkwater penned four historical plays : *Abraham Lincoln* (1918) *Mary Stuart* (1921—22) *Oliver Cromwell* (1922) and *Robert Lee* (1923). In each one of these plays there is a central dominating personality standing on a higher pedestal over the multiplicity of individually delineated characters. Clifford Bax wrote several historical plays, the chief of them being *Mr. Pepys* (1926) *Socrates* (1930), *The Venetian* (1936). Bax's effective treatment of character his skilful wielding of material, and his delicate sense of style give prime distinction to his work.\*

Biography has been dexterously used in two prominent plays of our times. *Barrets of Wimpole Street* by Rudolf Besier and *The Lady with a Lamp* by Reginald Berkley. In the former

\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

play biographical details about Robert Browning and Mr. Elizabeth Barret Browning form the texture of the play, while the latter play deals with the life and achievements of Florence Nightingale.

#### **The Irish Movement**

A new trend in modern drama was introduced by the Irish dramatists who brought about the Celtic Revival in literature. In the hands of the Irish dramatists like W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Leanox Robinson, T. C. Murray, and Edward Martyn, drama ceased to be realistic in character, and became an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people from remote days to their own times. The imaginative idealism which has always characterised the Celtic races, the love of passionate and dreamy poetry which has exercised a fascination over the Irish mind, the belief in the fairy world which has been an article of faith in the Irish people have been represented in modern Irish drama. The object of the above stated Irish dramatists was, "not to make people think but to make them feel; to give them an emotional and spiritual uplifting such as they might experience at Mass in a Cathedral or at the performance of a sympathy."

#### **Impressionism.**

Impressionism constitutes another important feature of modern drama. In the impressionistic plays of W. B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality, rather than in presenting reality as it is. Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than make an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or events.

#### **Expressionism.**

Expressionism is another important feature of modern drama. It marks an extreme reaction against naturalism. The movement which had started early in Germany made its way in English drama, and several modern dramatists like Sean O' Casey, C. K. Munro, H. F. Rubinstein, J. B. Priestley, Elmer Rice and Eugene O'Neill have made experiments in the expressionistic tendency in modern drama. "Expressionist drama was concerned

not with society but with man. It aimed to offer subjective, psychological analysis not so much of an individual as of a type, and it made much of the subconscious. For such a study, established dramatic forms and methods of expression were inadequate, and the expressionists threw overboard conventional structure in favour of an unrestricted freedom. Their dialogue was often cryptic and patterned, now verse, now prose, and was in every way as far removed from the naturalistic prose of the realist school as can well be imagined.”\*

#### **Comedy of Manners.**

There is a revival of the comedy of manners in modern dramatic literature. Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and Somerset Maugham have done much to revive the comedy of wit in our days. The drama after the second world war has not exhibited a love for comedy, and the social conditions of the period after the war are not very favourable for the blossoming of the artificial comedy of the Restoration age. ‘The Comedy of Manners is a tender plant and will not bloom if cold winds are blowing.’\*\*

#### **Stage Directions.**

In modern drama there are elaborate stage directions. These stage directions considerably ease the work of dramatic production on the stage. One comes across elaborate stage directions in the plays of Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw

#### **Technique.**

In modern drama the three classical unities of time, place and action are generally maintained. Dialogues in modern drama are short and trenchant. The lack of action is made up by fine dialogues. Further, ‘Soliloques’ and ‘Asides’ have been completely avoided in modern drama.

#### **Conclusion.**

Whatever confusion there may be, however, and whatever failure may occur, it is certain that the Renaissance of English drama heralded in the nineties of the last century has not lost its vital force, and modern drama is a tremendous literary force in twentieth century literature.

\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* A. Nicoll : British Drama:

**Q. 106.** Give your estimate of Henry Arthur Jones (1851—1929) and A. W. Pinero (1855—1934) as pioneers of the new drama in the twentieth century.

**Ans.** Henry Arthur Jones and A. W. Pinero were the pioneers in the field of twentieth century drama, and they carried forward the heritage of Robertson in their dramatic works.

The plays of Henry Arthur Jones can be divided into three periods. His earliest efforts were in the direction of producing sentimental and melodramatic plays. *The Silver King* (1882) is a landmark among his melodramatic plays. "His early melodramas were excellent, relying as they did on steadily intensifying emotion rather than on stage carpentry, and moving always to a climax that satisfied the ethical."\*

The second period began with *Saints and Sinners* (1884). Streaks of melodrama are combined with flashes of satire. This play is a prelude to many other social plays such as *The Crusades*, *The Hypocrites*, and the *Breaking of a Butterfly*. In these plays Jones endeavoured to present in a sincere way the problems of middle class life. Though here and there, there are melodramatic extravagances and a predilection for the picture poster situation yet the general impression left on our minds after reading these plays is that of realism. His plays portray the progressive individuals standing against the effete conventions of an outmoded and tyrannical society. Jones does not sympathise with the rebel like Susan Harabin, but he gives a good exposition to their point of view.

The third and the best period of Jones's dramatic art was devoted to the composition of comedies marked with satire and jollity. *The Liars* (1897) is a delightful comedy modelled on the style of the Comedy of Manners.

Jones was popularising social comedies, but the presence of melodramatic scenes militated against their social appeal. He lacked breadth of outlook and depth of thought, and was often led away by sentiment and melodramatic flashes. But in spite of these drawbacks he paved the way for social comedy and problem play.

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

Jones was a skilled craftsman with a real sense of the theatre and the ability to create effective scenes. But in every branch of drama he attempted, he failed to achieve signal success. "Jones's true value is as an innovator who pointed the way for others greater than himself."

**Arthur Wing Pinero.**

A. W. Pinero was the son of a lawyer and was intended for his father's profession, but he chose the dramatic field in preference to the wrangles of the law court. Like Jones, Pinero began with trivial comedies and farces, but later on drifted to the production of serious social plays. Pinero's first notable production *The Money Spinner* was followed by other comedies and social satires such as *The Magistrate* (1885), *The School Mistress* (1886), *Dandy Dick* (1887), *Sweet Lavender* (1888), *The Princess and the Butterfly* (1889), and *the Weaker Sex* (1889). These early attempts of Pinero are satirical in tone and reformatory in appeal.

Pinero's real genius as a dramatist is unfolded in his *The Profligate*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Thunderbolt*, and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebb Smith*. These plays are serious in tone and tragic in theme. They represent life in realistic colours. The much talked play *Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is an exceptionally vulgar and hideous piece of work. It deals with the machinations of a sinful woman to undo her respectable husband. It is destitute of healthy sentiment. Pinero was criticised by St. John Ervine for vulgarity, but the dramatist did not bother for the criticism; for the problem plays produced at this time were usually repugnant to good taste.

Pinero was a pioneer in the field of introducing realism and satire in drama. His realism was tempered by conventional melodramatic intrusions, mawkish sentimentalism and footlight expedients. Still the main accent in his works is on the prejudices and the errors of the upper middle class society of his age.

"Pinero had an effective sense of stage situation, his plays are well written and his characters are more life like than characters in English drama had been for generations before he began to write, though by the time of his death in 1934 most of his plays appeared naive and artificial to a generation that was

more sophisticated and better informed about life and its problems.”\*

#### **Assessment of Jones and Pinero.**

“In the hands of Pinero and Jones the drama was coming closer to real life. But they were both too clever and too sensitive to popular taste to advance too quickly. They knew that actor-manager is still wanted ‘for’ acting parts. They knew that the theatre-going public still wanted an absorbing story. And so they were careful to provide theatrical excitement of all good old kind. They still sacrificed consistency of characterisation to the exigencies of the plot. The catastrophe was brought about too often by co-incidence : they still faked circumstances for theatrical effect. Their realism was only superficial. The actions of the plays were always possible and credible, but sometimes questionably probable and seldom inevitable.”\*\*

“Neither Jones nor Pinero were more than skilful practioners who grew impatient with the mechanical patterns of drama as they found it and tried to provide novelty and depth by discussing problems of contemporary morality. They had neither the wit of Oscal Wilde nor of Shaw nor did they have the literary imagination” or the depth of moral and psychological understanding to be able to present a social problem as a typical one.”†

“In defence of Jones and Pinero it can be said that whatever failings they might have as pioneers in the field of realistic drama, they were masters of their craft and important figures in the dramatic revival of our times.

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**Q 107. Give a brief account of the main dramatic works of John Galsworthy (1867—1933).**

**Ans.** John Galsworthy was one of the greatest literary figures of the 20th century. He was a novelist, an essayist, a short story writer, a critic and a dramatist of repute. His main dramatic works are the following :—

\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature

\*\* Lynton Hudson : The Twentieth Century Drama.

† David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.

**The Silver Box.**

This book presents a criticism of the law prevailing in England during his times. It deals with the old criticism of British Law so pointedly referred to by Goldsmith in his *Traveller* that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Galsworthy tries to show in the *Silver Box* that law can be purchased by the power of wealth and he seems to re echo the lines of Goldsmith in the *Traveller* :—

*Laws grind the poor,*

*The rich men rule the Law.*

Jack Barthwick, the son of a rich M. P. commits the same crime of stealing as Jones, the poor man, but Jones is punished whereas Jack is allowed to go scot free. "Both father and son realize perfectly that Jones is being badly treated, that he and Jack should in a just society, have received the same punishment, but circumstances will it otherwise. The one is a rich man's son; the other is a nobody. Society, that invisible presence, determines that the rich shall be preferred to the poor." (Nicoll).

**The Strife.**

Galsworthy's *Strife* is a beautiful indictment of the present structure of industrial society. It presents the strife between capital and labour, and advocates better understanding between these two great forces of our industrial life. The leader of the capitalist is Antony and the leader of the labourers is Roberts. Galsworthy points out that in the interest of industrial harmony both capitalists and labourers should work in unison and should not unnecessarily fight for their rights. There should be reconciliation between the two parties since unnecessary strikes and lock-outs hamper the progress of industrial life and retard production.

**The Show.**

In this play, Galsworthy records his opposition to the press and to the general behaviour of journalists who make scandal of the public life of people by unnecessarily bringing their private affairs into the public eye. This play is a great attack upon the press which Galsworthy has so strongly criticised in his other novels and dramas such as *Maid in Waiting*.

"In *Show* the press is pilloried mercilessly and Galsworthy pleads for good sense for those who are manning the press today."  
**The Skin Game.**

*The Skin Game* is a criticism of the war. In this play Galsworthy presents his indictment of the Great War in an allegorical manner. The symbolism, which Galsworthy generally eschewed, is presented in this play. The situation is worked out in such a way that frequently it runs parallel to the situation of the War.

**The Forest.**

In this play, Galsworthy exposes the evils of our capitalistic society. It gives a picture of financiers and their unscrupulous ways and dishonest dealings in society. Galsworthy shows in this play that our industrial life is like a forest or a wilderness in which capitalists prowl like lions without any restraint upon the unwary and innocent people, ignorant of their financial tricks.

**The Joy.**

In *Joy* Galsworthy presents various forms of egoistic prejudices, delusion and numerous other vices that eat into the vitals of our life. Galsworthy wants to show in this play that most of the troubles in our life rise on account of egoism, selfishness, prejudices and lack of sympathy.

**A Family Man.**

This is a domestic drama and in this play Galsworthy attacks the misuse of authority and exposes its harmful consequences in domestic life. The dramatist very cleverly shows that too much exhibition of authority on the part of the elders is bound to lead to rebellion in the young hearts of grown up people. He suggests that undue authority should not be exercised and elders in the family should exercise restraint in the use of authority over their subordinates. The play is absurdly improbable and even farcical, but it successfully derides the idea that man can treat the members of his family like a piece of property, and so points a moral which is brilliantly elaborated in *The Forsyte Saga*.

**Justice.**

*Justice* is a social tragedy and is one of the greatest works of Galsworthy. It is a plea for greater sympathy for the derelicts and waifs of society. In this play Galsworthy shows that a man who



commits some theft under very straitened circumstances like Falder should not be subjected to the course of law, because it is our society that is responsible for turning innocent people into sinners. The speech of Frome in the court of law represents Galsworthy's attitude towards the subject of justice and law courts. In short, it is a play that deals with the problems of the criminal and the treatment of society towards such criminals.

#### **The Mob.**

In the *Mob*, Galsworthy presents the mentality of the mob, its obstinacy and its unthinking mind. It is the story of an idealist who stands against the mob and who is ultimately defeated by the forces of the mob. In this tragedy Galsworthy shows how idealists and visionaries are crucified at the altar of mob mentality. Galsworthy's great dislike for mob mentality is expressed in these words in the drama.

“You—mob, are most contemptible thing under the sun. You are the thing that pelts the weak; kicks women; hurls down free speech. This is today, that to-morrow. Brain you have none. Spirit—not the least of it.”

These words against the mob represent the spirit of this play.

#### **A Bit of Love.**

In this play Galsworthy presents the tragedy of an idealist who is misunderstood by the world. It is the story of an idealist whose principles of life are far higher than the understanding of ordinary people in our society. The idealist has to suffer a lot at the hands of the people because he is not willing to sacrifice the high principles of his life. Galsworthy tries to show in this play that any one willing to stick to high principles must be ready to suffer opposition and persecution in his life. However, the lesson under-lying this play is that in the ordinary course of life idealism should not be carried too far because it does not pay to be an extreme idealist in the world of realities.

#### **The Eldest Son.**

*The Eldest Son* is a social tragedy based upon caste feeling. The subject of this tragedy is that strong family traditions and prestige must be maintained at all costs and should not be sacrificed for any feelings. Conscience can be sacrificed at the altar of family prestige and traditions.

**Loyalties.**

Galsworthy's *Loyalties* is a play in which the dramatist deals with the subject of caste prejudice or caste feelings. It is a cry against racial prejudice shown by the Christians to one Captain Dancy, a Jew. Different kinds of loyalties are presented in this play. The most noticeable being the loyalty to race, loyalty to friendship; professional loyalty and lastly the loyalty to married life.

**Foundations.**

In *Foundations*, Galsworthy teaches that a religion of kindness is the only remedy for removing the evils caused by caste prejudices and caste feelings. He advocates sympathy and charity for the suffering people and this play pleads for imaginative sympathy for the waifs and derelicts of society. The same idea is carried further in another play *Escape*. In both these plays, Galsworthy presents the true spirit of humanity which he regards as the negation of caste feeling.

These are the prominent plays of John Galsworthy and anyone, desiring to have a thorough understanding of Galsworthy should read R. H. Coats's book *Galsworthy As A Dramatic Artist*. The plays of Galsworthy have been discussed by Coats under the following heads :—

- (1) Plays of Family Relationships (Joy—A Family Man)
- (2) Social Injustice (The Silver Box; The Show, The Forest).
- (3) The Tragedy of Idealism.
- (4) Plays of Class and Caste Feeling.

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**Q. 108. Give your estimate of John Galsworthy as a Dramatist.**

**Ans.** John Galsworthy was one of the greatest dramatists of the school of realism and naturalism in drama, and played a conspicuous part in popularising the Problem Play in the twentieth century. He was a dramatist of social life and concentrated his attention on problems facing us in society. He found his material and inspiration in the world of everyday life and affairs, and described himself 'as a painter of pictures, a maker of things, as sincerely as I know how, imagined out of what I have seen and

felt.\* Leaving aside *The Little Dream*, he maintained a realistic attitude in his dramas consistently and it was his avowed object as a dramatist to deal with the actual facts and conditions of contemporary life, instead of making excursions into the realms of fancy and romance. Like the Scottish dramatist Barrie, Galsworthy was wedded to the actual and tried to present as faithfully as he could the phenomena of life and character without fear, favour or prejudice. He made no attempt to glorify and embellish the dreary realities of a dull life with the false colours of romance, but strove to create an illusion of actual life on the stage "as to compel the spectator to pass through an experience of his own, to think and make and write with people he saw thinking, talking, and moving in front of him."† His work is rooted in contemporary life and provides a vivid and fairly accurate picture of the conditions society of the times in which he lived. He has defined art as "the perfect expression of self in contact with the world", and his dramatic art at least is based on his reaction to the world at large.

He is the critic and the interpreter of contemporary English life in his dramas. In his plays we have a fine discussion of the problems of marriage, sex relationship, labour disputes, administration of law, solitary confinement, caste feeling or class prejudice. In *Silver Box* and *Justice*, he deals with the problem of justice and the cruel working of the legal machinery. In *Strife* he concentrates on the conflict between capital and labour, and in *The Skin Game* he brings out the conflict between the landed gentry and the new capitalistic class. The main plays of Galsworthy deal with social problems. These varied problems of our social life are treated by Galsworthy in relation with the social organism as a whole. Ibsen had also dealt with problems in his dramas, but he treated social problems in relation to the individual or the family. Shaw occasionally dealt with the problems of the individual in relation with society, but Galsworthy always discussed problems in relation to social organism.

#### **His Impartiality and Detachment.**

Galsworthy deals with the problems of life with impartiality.

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\* Life and Letters of J. Galsworthy Ed. by H. V. Marrot.

† Galsworthy : 'Some Platitudes Concerning Drama'

He is an artist and takes a detached view of the problems, though by probing deeply we can feel his sympathy with one side or the other. But as a rule he examines both sides of the case with equal carefulness and presents them without expressing any opinion. He strikes the note of impartiality in the following words, "Let me try to eliminate any bias and see the whole thing as should an umpire, one of those pure things in white coats; purged of all the prejudices, passions and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being. Only from an impersonal point of view, there be such a thing as I going to get even approximately at the truth." While presenting the picture of contemporary life, he keeps himself in the background. He does not allow his own personality to intrude into his dramas. In his plays he has always tried to present both sides of a problem with strict impartiality. To maintain balance and poise in his dramatic technique, he has not been swept off his feet by emotion. He might be emotionally sympathetic to this character or that, to this class or the other, but as a dramatist he successfully checks the temptation of treating any particular character with undue partiality.

In his *Silver Box* Jones, an unemployed young man, steals a silver purse in a fit of drunkenness, from Jack Barthwick, the idle son of a wealthy Liberal M. P. We can hardly blame Jones for this trifling crime when unemployment was prevalent everywhere and when even Jack Barthwick himself could steal the silver purse from an unknown lady and go unpunished by law. But a strictly impartial judge like Galsworthy cannot allow this crime to go unpunished, though he allows Jones to have his full say and hints at the fact that there were two laws prevalent at that time, one for the rich and the other for the poor, and Jones because he is poor, cannot hope for that justice which he could easily buy if he were rich. "If Galsworthy had been made of cheaper clay he would have made the Barthwicks unspeakable villains, and the Joneses the innocent victims. But old Barthwick is a well meaning man, and Jones is a scoundrel and a wife-beater. There is good and bad on both sides. The balance is made as fair as the dramatist can make it."\*

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

In *Strife* also the balance is kept intact with perfect impartiality. The dramatist presents both sides of the case. He presents the case for Capital and Labour with strict impartiality. In the play the scales are held dispassionately and the readers only feel the futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides; the side of Anthony, the capitalist and Roberts, the labour leader.

Instances can be multiplied to show Galsworthy's impartial approach to the problems of life. As an artist he kept his impartiality admirably well, with the result that his plays seem inconclusive. There is no finality about them.

#### **Galsworthy's Sympathy and Humanity.**

Though Galsworthy presents his situations and characters with impartiality, yet, if we go deep down in his plays, we can detect his sympathy for the down-trodden and the underdog in society. His sympathy extends even to animals. He has a Tolstoyan reverence for all life. Once the veil of this intellectual impartiality is lifted, the humanist in Galsworthy is clearly revealed, voicing his strongest protest against the cruelty and injustice of our society. The warmth of feeling could hardly be chilled by the cold touch of the necessities of dramatic art. The humanistic approach to life, and its problems is evident in almost all the plays of Galsworthy and the best example of it can be given from *Justice*. Galsworthy's sympathy is evidently with Falder. In the defence of the counsel for Falder, we feel the voice of Galsworthy himself. It appears to us that the dramatist has put off his lawyer's gown and is passionately appealing to consider the case of the accused with compassion. The judge may turn a deaf ear to the sentimental appeal of Mr. Frome, the lawyer for Falder, but it will never fail to find a sympathetic echo in the hearts of the readers and the audience, because the voice of the dramatist is presented through Frome. In this respect it is interesting to compare Galsworthy with Bernard Shaw. Shaw has actually more imaginative sympathy than is usually conceded to him, but his satiric gift, his genius for derision causes him to appear cynical. Shaw is carried away by his own views to such an extent that he fails to enter adequately into the view point of others. Galsworthy is never guilty of this lapse of dramatic sympathy and understand-

ing. Where Shaw would scoff and curse, Galsworthy would wince and ultimately find himself constrained to bless. "Shaw's intellectualism runs to witty satire and attack; Galsworthy's emotionalism leads rather to charity and sympathy and toleration."

"Underlying the plot of each of Galsworthy's plays, there is a broad current of intense humanity which preserves his work from the ravages of time. *Strife* is not an ephemeral pamphlet but a study of the spirit of dihardism, that robs men of their discretion, warps their judgment, and leads to bitter conflict and suffering. *Justice* deals with the blindness of the judicial system; it was blind in the Greeks and Romans and there is no reason to suppose it will not be blind in future. The system may change, but the lack of understanding and foresight shown by common humanity will persist, and lead to suffering such as was experienced by Falder."\*

#### **Galsworthy's moral purpose and reformatory tone.**

Galsworthy had infinite sympathy for his downtrodden and crushed characters. He was pained by the conditions prevailing in society, and it was his hearty desire to reform the evils of our social life. But Galsworthy could not be a blatant propagandist like Shaw. He suggested reform in his dramas, but the tone of the reformer is hushed and muffled. That he intended to introduce reform in society through his plays cannot be gainsaid. There is hardly any one of his plays which does not convey a message or a lesson. There is a moral note in each one of his plays. He believed that every work of art should have a moral or a "Spire of meaning." "A drama" he has himself pointed out, "must be so shaped as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral and the business of the dramatist is to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day." Didacticism was the main spring of his art. His didacticism is not obtrusive. His dramas have, strictly speaking, not a moral which may be obtrusive but a spire of meaning which develops itself as naturally from the drama as a spire completes the structure of a Gothic church. The public gets this mea-

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\* Dr. R. C. Gupta : The Problem Play.

ning, not through a coarse melodramatic opposition of villain and hero (as in the older dramas), not even through any intellectual argument, but through emotional sympathy with characters presented in such a way as to appeal to the spectator's sense of truth and justice.

In *Strife* the moral is that we should not be adamant and head-strong in our view but should seek honourable compromise over issues which cannot be resolved without sacrifice of principle. In *Loyalties* he denounces racial prejudice and pleads for just social treatment to all classes of people in society. In *Silver-Box* he desires to avoid the evils of unemployment and pleads for sympathy for the waifs and derelicts of society and so on.

#### Plot Construction

In his book *The Inn of Tranquillity* Galsworthy makes a pregnant observation about plot construction. He points out, "A good plot is that sure edifice which rises out of the interplay of circumstances on temperament and of temperament on circumstances, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea." The plots of Galsworthy's plays are based on ideas and hang on characters. The stories of Galsworthy's plays receive their significance from the characters and the ideas that are interwoven in them. Each play of Galsworthy has a theme, and every incident happening in the scene contributes to the furtherance of the theme. The theme is grounded on the idea evolved in the play.

Galsworthy's plot construction is based on a situation or incident, and the reaction of a few characters to that situation. The loss of money in *Loyalties* is the starting point, and the play unfolds, as different characters present their reaction to the alleged charge of theft on Captain Dancy.

The plots of Galsworthy have real, critical, pleasant climaxes and surprises, that keep up the interest of the play and save them from being jejune and dull. R. H. Coats refers to the *climax* and *surprises* in Galsworthy's plots in an admirable manner. He says, "On the whole, Galsworthy's climaxes are good. They are not included in literary play, but where they do occur, they are reached naturally and inevitably by a kind of sure pointing forward and acceleration from the beginning." The element of

suspense is also maintained in his plays. In the *Silver-Box* our suspense is kept right to the end. We do not know whether Jack Barthwick would be punished in the same manner as Jones. In *Loyalties* we hold our breath till the perpetrator of the 91000 robbery is discovered. In *Escape* we are ill at ease so long as the fate of Denant is not decided. In *Justice*, when two advocates plead for and against Falder, we are kept in suspense till the judge announces judgment. There is a dexterous management of suspense in the *Eldest Son* where previous to the arrival of Sir William at a critical point in the play, the family anxiously discusses what his attitude to Bill and Freda is likely to be.

One special feature of Galsworthy's plot construction is the employment of the technique of parallelism. In *Silver Box* there is a parallelism between Jack and Jones, and the same is noticed in *Skin Game* between Hillcrist and Harbowler.

Galsworthy's architectural instinct in plot construction is also a special feature of his art. He builds the structure of his plot like an architect. The edifice reared by him is perfect in harmony and symmetry. There is no lopsidedness in his plays. Each play stands as a perfect whole. Referring to this architectural quality of Galsworthy's plays J. W. Marriott remarks, "Galsworthy's architectural instinct for symmetry and poise was just a trifle too strong. The artistic conscience which controlled his writing corresponds to the social conscience which controlled his daily life"\*

#### Characterisation.

Galsworthy's characters are drawn from common life. His personages range between the accidental thief and the middle class member of Parliament, the workman and the company director, the charwoman and the colonel wife. His heroes are common men and rarely do we come across in his tragic plays heroes of the dimension of King Lear, Macbeth or Othello.

Galsworthy's characters are evolved from the impact of situations. They advance and grow as the drama unfolds the idea underlying each play.

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.



Galsworthy's characters are types rather than individuals. His characters are embodiments of certain ideas, and hence they tend to be types rather than individual figures.

Galsworthy's heroes and heronies are highly emotional. Emotion is the stuff of their life. The characters of Shaw are generally intellectual, and stand well contrasted with the emotional characters of Galsworthy. The characters of Galsworthy fail to give proper and adequate expression to their emotional feelings. They are subdued and fail to give proper ventilation to their feelings. "One cannot help contrasting Galsworthy's characters with those of Bernard Shaw, whose characters are all articulate to the point of volubility. There is no need to guess their emotions; they expound them with wonderful lucidity. But in the case of Galsworthy, it often happens that an incoherent ejaculation or a clumsy gesture is more eloquent than a fine speech because it hints at the unplumbed depths of agony suffered by the dumb animals of the human race."\* There is much force in Galsworthy's own admission about his characters when he says, "About Shaw's plays one might say that they contain characters who express emotions which they do not possess. About mine one might say that they contain characters who possess emotions which they cannot express."

Broadly speaking the characters of Galsworthy are purely English. They are dominated by traits common to English men and women. There is little theatricality about them. They are the product of a naturalistic technique, and hence there is truth and verisimilitude in their presentation. We recognise the ordinary humanity in Galsworthy's characters. Schalit rightly remarks, "Galsworthy's characters are dire in action, never farfetched or self stultifying. They are always drawn from the average man and woman of our immediate surroundings. From the very outset he surrounds his characters with a peculiar atmosphere of its own and maintains it throughout and thus in each case has something faithful, something inevitable about it."

Galsworthy's thumb-nail sketches of characters introduced in stage direction are equally impressive, The hints presented

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

by the stage representation of characters are enough to make the character stand out before us in clear outline. Edward Fillarton is represented on the stage "as one of those clean shaven naval men of good presence who has returned from sea but not from their susceptibilities."

In characterisation, Galsworthy scores a triumph over Bernard Shaw. The characters of the Shavian plays are all mouth-pieces through which the dramatist propagates his theories. They act and talk as the dramatist likes them to, and in their movements there is always some wire pulling from behind. As a result of this, the Shavian characters have been mere lifeless machines. But Galsworthy never allows his personality to intrude into his plays. His characters move and act according to dramatic needs. They have been brought down from an intellectual to a human level and as such they never cease to impress or interest us. "Since the characters must be deliberately posed in order to carry out a pattern they are hardly likely to be inspired with a life of their own. Perhaps this will explain why he has created few great personalities who have an existence outside the plays—personalities like Cyrano de Bergerac, Peter Pan or Sir John Falstaff."\*

Though Galsworthy has not been able to create characters of the same excellence as Shakespeare, yet he has also created some nice characters which may be taken as types rather than as individuals. We have such fine characters in Galsworthy as John Anthony in *Strife*, Mrs. Jones in *The Silver Box*; Falder in *Justice*, Captain Dancy in *Loyalties* and these characters cannot be forgotten. We shall always remember the stubborn rigidity of purpose in Anthony, Cordelia like simplicity and sincerity in Mrs. Jones, intense restlessness in Captain Dancy, and tragic irony in Falder.

#### Dialogues.

Galsworthy lays great emphasis on dialogues. In *Some Platitudes Concerning Drama* he writes about the importance of dialogue in an effective play—"The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all licence, grudging

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, supposing all jokes and epigrams served from character, relying for fun and pathos as the fun and tears of life. *From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.*"\*

The dialogues of Galsworthy are pointed and sharp though they lack the play of corruscating wit present in the sparkling dialogues of Bernard Shaw. Galsworthy's dialogues are effective in the presentation of tragic emotion of a subdued character. His dialogues are generally short and to the point though there are long speeches as well here and there as Frome's speech in *Justice* and Anthony's defence of capitalism in *Strife*.

#### **His Craftsmanship.**

Galsworthy is a great craftsman in his dramatic art. He knows the art of plot construction, and of giving to his plot a keen sense of dramatic effectiveness. He manages his plots with economy, restraint and concentration. Every word beats on the action or reveals character or suggests the attitude which Galsworthy desires his spectators to take. The same artistic thrift is seen in his stage directions also. Stage directions in modern drama are always very important, but some dramatists, like Shaw, carry their stage directions to the length of an essay. Galsworthy never errs in this respect. He never says too much, but at the same time, he never omits any single detail which is important.

#### **Galsworthy's dramatic effectiveness.**

We do not, however, claim for Galsworthy the Shakespearean genius of portraying that 'double-conflict', conflict with the elemental forces and simultaneously conflict with conscience, but nevertheless, this much credit must be given to Galsworthy that he has succeeded in creating some very fine dramatic moments by a few subtle hints and suggestions. Such dramatic moments are present in all his plays. In *Strife* the two unbending leaders of Capital and Labour respectively are deserted by their followers to force a compromise. They stare at each other and there is in

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\* J. Galsworthy ; Some Platitudes Concerning Drama.

their looks a dramatic intensity that keeps us spell bound for sometime. Let us note the words—

**Roberts :** "Then you are no longer Chairman of this company ? (Breaking into half-mad laughter) Ah ha-ah ha, ha ! They've thrown you, over-thrown their chairman Ah-ha ha ! (with a sudden dreadful calm) So they've done us both down, Mr. Anthony ?"

"Anthony rises with an effort. He turns to Roberts, who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other, fixedly ; Anthony lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of Robert's face changes from hostility to wonder....."

**Play of Irony,**

In Galsworthy's dramatic art Dramatic Irony as well as Irony of Life are presented with great care and astuteness. There is a note of irony in all his plays. It has become a part of Galsworthy's art. For example, in *Justice* the machinery which the Law has devised for dispensing justice, results in producing marked injustice. In *Strife* Capital and Labour come into collision causing untold suffering and wastage to all concerned. When both parties are thoroughly exhausted, they strive at a compromise, the terms of which are exactly the same as had been proposed before the quarrel began and which had been contemptuously rejected by both the parties then. Trench the Secretary, reveals the irony of the situation in the concluding lines of the drama.

**Trench** (staring at Harness—Suddenly excited. Do you know, Sir—these terms, they are the very same we drew up together you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began ? All this—all this—and what for ?

**Harness** (In a slowgrim voice)

That's where the fun comes in.

**Conclusion.**

The general effect left on our mind after reading Galsworthy's plays is one of despair and gloom. His dramatic world is mainly grey. His tragic plays are for the most part serious, even sombre. But he is not a pessimist. There is a ray of hope that the lot of human beings would be better in the world to come. He believes; that the cause of tragedy in social life lies failure of

sympathy and imagination, and he hopes that human lot is capable of amelioration.

**Q. 109** What is Galsworthy's conception of tragedy and irony ? What brings about tragedy in his plays ?

**Ans.** Galsworthy, unlike Bernard Shaw, had specialised in writing tragedies. Shaw is a comedian, and Galsworthy is a tragedian. The tragedies of human life exercised a powerful hold on Galsworthy's mind, and he produced social tragedies marked with irony and waste. His principal plays : *The Fugitive*, *The Mob*, *Justice*, *Loyalties* and *Old English* are all tragedies resulting in the deaths of the heroes. Other plays of Galsworthy, in which death does not occur but suffering is of an oppressive character, are *Silver Box*, *Skin Game* and *Strife*. They are all social tragedies. In the former five plays there is tragedy in the sense that the frustrated hero meets his tragic death in circumstances which produce gloom and despair. In the later three plays there is tragedy resulting in hardship, frustration and waste to the main characters of the play. In all the plays there is tragic gloom and despair, and a sense of frustration and waste overpowering us at the end.

What is the cause of all this tragic gloom and despair in Galsworthy's plays ? Why do we have tragedies at all ? Can they not be averted ?

Galsworthy's tragic conception is different from the Greeks and the Elizabethan tragedy writers. The Greeks believed in the power of fate in bringing about tragedy. Gods were against poor mortals and hence they hurled thunder-bolts on them. Tragedy in human life was an act of divine dispensation resulting in gloom and despair in human life. The change in this fatalistic conception of tragedy upheld by the Greeks was sounded by the Elizabethans particularly by Shakespeare who believed that the cause of tragedy lay in some fatal flaw in the character of the hero. Tragedy was mainly the outcome of a person's own frailties. Gods and supernatural powers had little to do with human tragedies, though some uncontrollable circumstances added to the tragic happenings in the plays. The tragedy of Hamlet was principally due to his wavering and vacillating

nature. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth met their tragic doom due to over-ambition and Othello met his end as the result of his credulity

Galsworthy's conception of tragedy is different both from the Greeks and the Elizabethans. Tragedy in Galsworthy is the outcome not so much of human frailties of character or divine dispensation, as the result of mal-social-adjustment and big social forces working against a weak human character. The tragic characters of Galsworthy, Falder, Jones, Dancy are weaklings, and it is not possible for them to defend themselves against forceful social forces which crush them at the end. No doubt, these tragic characters of Galsworthy have some flaws of character, but their little frailties would not have resulted in grim and gruesome tragedies if the mighty social forces had not been pitted against them. Galsworthy lays greater force on social machinery, particularly the legal machinery for dispensing justice for the cause of the tragedy than on the frailties of his characters. It is this over emphasis on social forces and institutions as the principal grinding force in human life that turns tragedies of Galsworthy into social tragedies. The cause of tragedy in Galsworthy's plays is the crushing nature of big institutions and big organizations pitted against the erring and yet feeble mortals.

In *Silver Box*, Jones and his wife suffer because the rolling engine of law crushes them. "The real villain is neither Jones nor Jack Barthwick, but the judicial system for which we are all responsible. The audience is in the docks confronted with the crime of having approved that system." In *Justice* Falder is the victim of a system of law that fails to distinguish a hardened criminal from a social weakling. The law crushes the miserable and the weak as it crushes the poor.

The tragedies of Galsworthy give the impression of tremendous waste. Poor characters like Jones and Falder are crushed mercilessly under a system that is rotten to the core. There is misery and suffering for all classes of people because we cannot set aright the vitiated legal machinery that oppresses the poor more than the rich. The sense of waste in Galsworthy's plays further brought about by unnecessary bickerings and struggles

among people without any sense of broad vision in life. Pugnacity in human nature is the cause of much waste and frustration in human life. In *Strife*, there is waste, suffering and tragedy among the poor labourers because of pugnacity, bickering and short-sightedness on the part of Anthony the leader of the capitalists. In the *Skin Game* there is waste due to a lack of understanding between the landed gentry and the new capitalistic class. Much of the waste in social life can be removed if human beings develop a sense of sympathy and mutual understanding.

Unfortunately human beings fail to develop the broad vision that might set things aright. Therein comes the play of irony in Galsworthy's tragedies. The irony in *Justice* is that the machinery which the Law has devised for dispensing justice results in producing marked injustice. In *Strife* Capital and Labour come into collision causing untold suffering to all concerned in the industry. When both parties are thoroughly exhausted, they strive at a compromise, the terms of which are exactly the same as had been proposed before the quarrel began and which had been contemptuously rejected by both the parties then. Trench, the secretary, reveals the irony of the situation in the concluding lines of the drama.

"Trench (staring at Harness, suddenly excited) D'you know, Sir,—these terms, they're the *very same* we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and what for?"

Harness (in a slow, grim voice). That's where the fun comes in!"

There is always an undercurrent of irony in Galsworthy's tragedies which is more impressive than open denunciation of the social system. "Irony of ironies" says the dramatist, "all is irony." He leaves the audience to discover it.

"The irony in Galsworthy does not breed pessimism as it does in the novels of Hardy. Hardy's world is quite different from the world of Galsworthy. Hardy believes that not only the social institutions are malignant, but the whole universe is against the progress of man, virtue can never flourish, that vice escapes without punishment. This dark dismal view of

nature is not shared by Galsworthy. He believes that there is no conscious ill will or malice in nature against man, but the social institutions man has set up are against his progress."

Galsworthy's tragedies are gloomy and the impression of greyness overpowers us. But the gloom is not cimmerian. There is some ray of hope that if human beings entrenched in power and authority cultivate sympathy and a humanitarian outlook and big institutions and social and legal machinery are reformed many social tragedies can be averted. This is the underlying hope in each one of Galsworthy's social tragedies.

**Q. 110. "Galsworthy has no heroes and no villains." Discuss**

**Ans.** The study of Galsworthy's social plays and social tragedies clearly reveals the absence of heroes found in classical tragedies of ancient Greece, Marlowian tragedies and the tragedies of Shakespeare during the Elizabethan age. In these old tragedies of a remote age the heroes were drawn from ranks of higher life, and were endowed with heroic qualities of valour, heroism, ambition and kingly glory. Eminent persons from the higher strata of life were the heroes of classical, Elizabethan, and Restoration heroic tragedies. Agamemnon, King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Aurengzeb were heroes in the real sense of the term. But in the case of Galsworthy we do not come across heroes of the type mentioned above. Galsworthy's heroes are drawn from the common stock of ordinary humanity and are subject to the frailties and foibles to which all of us are subject. The heroes of Galsworthy are not men of superhuman strength like the heroes of the heroic tragedies of Dryden and Otway, nor are they fired with inordinate ambition like Macbeth. They do not have the introspective and psychological ratiocination of Hamlet, nor do they have the incredible credulity of Othello. There is nothing of the intensely heroic in the heroes of Galsworthy like Jones, Falder, and Roberts.

Galsworthy's plays are problem plays. They are social tragedies, based upon the sorrows and sufferings brought about to common men and women by the maladjustment of society and the evil social forces such as the system of legal justice prevalent in our society. In such tragedies a hero of the type



of Marlowian hero would have been out of place. Instead of submitting to the forces militating against his powerful ambition, he would have hurled defiance and stubbornly stood against all social inhibitions. Such a hero would have been out of place in a social tragedy like the *Silver Box* and *Justice* in which the hero is crushed by a powerful social machinery, particularly the machinery of legal dispensation that makes no difference between a hardened criminal and a weakling. For social tragedies, Galsworthy needed heroes, who were neither militant nor defiant, but meek, docile and easily expressible. The force of the social tragedies would have been lost if hero had been a powerful man going down after a bitter and uncompromising hostility against a ruthless social system. The force and pity of Galsworthy's social tragedies would have been lost in the presence of such heroes of fire and fury though ultimately signifying nothing. Hence to make his social tragedies pathetic and appealing to the better sense of humanity, he has created tragic heroes, who are weak, supine, nerveless, without anything of that greatness which Aristotle had outlined for tragic heroes in his *Poetics*. Coats makes a pointed reference to the pathetic tone of Galsworthy's tragedies in the following lines, "The power of the law or the mob or capitalistic society so overwhelms the individual, whether innocent or guilty, that he is rendered impotent. So disproportionate are the protagonists that struggle seems useless and tears are vain. The result is that whereas in classical and romantic tragedy the hero is so wrestless with fate or villainy that he rises superior to disaster even when overwhelmed by it, and thus awakens in us feelings of admiration and reverential awe. Social tragedy of Galsworthy's type moves us rather to sentiments of compassion."

Let us examine a few heroes of Galsworthy. Jones in *Silver Box* is one type. He is a poor man and it is very difficult for him to make both ends meet. He has a wife and children. He tries to bring them up decently. In a moment of lassitude he picks up the silver box dropped by Barthwick. He is prosecuted for that, and he goes down whinnying under a legal system which he cannot oppose. He is the victim of social conventions, and he cannot powerfully raise his voice against the

Falder in *Justice* is another weakling. He commits forgery, but after that he has no stamina to stand the trial. He commits suicide at the end because he finds the social forces too strong for him. These tragic heroes of Galsworthy evoke pity and sympathy, rather than awe and admiration. They do not struggle and as such they fail to win our applause. They are pathetic rather than heroic characters. They are the victims of a perverted and twisted social system.

These tragic heroes of Galsworthy are quite in keeping with the democratic traditions of the modern age. The twentieth century is the age of common man, rather than kings and princes. The common man of democracy has come into his own during the present century. In conformity with the needs of the time, dramatists have changed the ethos of drama. Galsworthy's tragic heroes are common men, and they are presented in social relationship with the powerful social institutions and machinery working in society. Jones in *Silver Box* is a very common man, a servant in the Barthwick family. Falder is a clerk, who commits forgery in a state of social distress. He is a weakling. Even captain Dancy in *Loyalties* is not the brasshat, but a common soldier, who commits suicide at the end. All these heroes of Galsworthy are common men and are the product of the modern democratic and socialistic age. They are the products of the modern age of realism and tragic waste. They could not have been created in any other age except our own. Coats has rightly touched on the social, democratic, and realistic aspects of Galsworthy's heroes in the following words, "Galsworthy usually refuses to heighten his characters by putting them on pedestals or exalting them to more than ordinary proportions. To do this would be an offence against realism and would at the same time involve a failure to emphasize the social aspect of modern tragedy. Accordingly he makes the majority of his characters mediocre and even mean, that we may the more readily recognise in them our ordinary selves."\*

Just as there are no tragic heroes of the dimensions of the tragic heroes of the Restoration heroic tragedies or tragic hero

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\* Coats : Galsworthy

of the Elizabethan times, similarly there is the absence of powerful and crooked villains like Iago and Bosola in Galsworthy's social tragedies. The question of unmitigated villains like Iago and Edmund does not arise when there are no heroes matching their subtlety and crooked ingenuity. The classical conception of a villain is neither accepted by Galsworthy nor practised by him in his tragedies. Galsworthy seems to follow Meredith's dictum :

*In tragic life, God wot*

*No villain need be ! passions spin the plot.*

The role of the villain in Galsworthy's social tragedies is taken by society and the audience. In place of one single individual who plays the role of the villain in bringing about tragedy, like Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the vitiated and corrupted social system and the audience that tolerate it constitute the villain in Galsworthy's social tragedies. Take for example *The Silver Box*. Who is the villain in this tragedy ? The villain is neither Jack Barthwick nor his father, but the vitiated social machinery that brings untold misery to the poor and shields the rich from the iron clutches of law. J. W. Marriott directs our attention to the villain in *Silver Box*. He says, "The real villain is neither Jones nor Jack Barthwick, but the judicial system for which we are all responsible. The audience is in the dock, confronted with the crime of having approved that system."\* The same is applicable to *Justice*. Here the villain is again the big and yet hollow machinery of law that fails to make a distinction between the hardened criminal and the spineless weakling like Falder. In Galsworthy's plays there are no die-hard villains who seek to bring the downfall of the hero through evil stratagems and machinations of their own like Edmund in *King Lear* and Iago in *Othello*.

Q 111. "This might be said of Shaw's plays that he creates characters who express feelings which they have not got. It might be said of mine that I create characters who have feelings which they cannot express." (Galsworthy) Discuss.

Ans Galsworthy makes a subtle and appreciative distinc-

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

tion between the characters created by Bernard Shaw and his own self in his plays. There is much truth in Galsworthy's observation about the Shavian and Galsworthian characters.

The characters of Bernard Shaw are generally speaking intellectual and rational. They are dominated by wit and intellectuality rather than by emotions and sentiments. They are the creations of the intellect rather than pure passion and emotion. They are forced to express feelings and emotions which they do not strongly feel, but which they are required to express just for the exigencies of the stage. They express their supposed or real emotions with exuberance and lucidity

The characters of Galsworthy, on the other hand, are not intellectual or witty, but creatures of emotion and passion, which they cannot adequately express in words. Their hearts are full of emotion and powerful feelings, but they are not the masters of language and emotional expression.

This distinction between the characters of Shaw and Galsworthy is nicely presented by J. W. Marriott in *Modern Drama*. He says, "There is always conflict in Galsworthy's drama, and there is always an undercurrent of irony which is more impressive than open denunciation. The characters are unable to express their sense of wrong, but their very inarticulateness is moving. One cannot help contrasting these methods with those of Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose characters are all articulate to the point of volubility. There is no need to guess their emotions; they expound them with wonderful lucidity. But it often happens (as in the case of Galsworthy's characters) that an incoherent ejaculation or a clumsy gesture is more eloquent than a fine speech because it hints at the unplumbed depths of agony suffered by the dumb animals of the human race."\*

Let us first examine a few characters of Bernard Shaw. Take up the case of Raina and Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man*. Most of them are intellectual characters, and though they express emotions of love, yet we can certainly feel that the emotional expression is forced rather than an outcome of powerful

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\* J. W. Marriott : *Modern Drama*.

feelings of love and sentiment. Bluntschli is a practical soldier and is not the creature of emotion. He loves Raina, but he is never exuberant and emotional in his expression. Raina, too, is a creature of the intellect though she is a woman and ought to have more of emotion than intellect. Her emotional feeling expressed to Sergius seem to be forced. Shaw has purged both these characters of mere sentiment, and has made them witty and sharp. In *Candida*, the heroine is not the creature of emotions, though she is lost in the tangle of love between her husband Morell and her admirer Marchbank. She is not passionate. The emotions expressed by her with lucidity are not felt in the blood but felt in the soul. She gives expression to her emotions which are not deeply felt. Her emotions are under the control of her commonsense. In *Man and Superman*, emotion is suppressed by discussion and philosophical disquisition on the value of life force. Ann and Tanner are the creatures of a theory, and voice Shaw's feelings about life force. The emotion of love that superficially binds them is not given a heart felt expression. In *Apple Cart*, King Magnet is an intellectual character, and the manner in which he upsets the apple cart of the Prime Minister Proteus clearly shows the dominance of his intellect over emotions. He is also an emotional creature and has his love affair with a lady of questionable morality. His expression of love to the lady is more intellectual than emotional, and the flow of emotion is suppressed by the rush of philosophical wisdom embodied in the expression.

The characters of Galsworthy are more emotional than intellectual creatures. Galsworthy's plays are social tragedies and tragic emotion in them is well saturated even to the deepest core of the play. His theme is intellectual, some social problem that needs intellectual handling, but in the course of the manipulation of the plot, the intellectual tone is hushed and muffled by humanitarian or emotional considerations. His characters grapple with the problem on an intellectual plain, but soon emotion and sentiment overpower them, and the intellectual tone is subdued by the emotional temper. In *Loyalties* the play starts with the problem of theft. It is a highly complicated situation. How could the money of De Levis be stolen when it was kept

at a safe place? It is a case for the Scotland Yard police, and needs a Sherlock Holmes to unravel the mystery. But as the play moves ahead this intellectual tone is subdued, and the emotional and sentimental side come on the surface. All the characters are swayed away by emotions. The emotion of Christian brotherhood leads them to denounce De Levis, the Jew. They are swept away by the force of racial discrimination, and lose themselves in denunciation of the Jew. But they do not have language to express their emotion of hatred for the Jew in the same language in which Gratiano and Antonio express the hatred for the Jew, Shylock, in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Their emotional exuberance is not adequately expressed in words. They have feelings of hatred for the Jew, but they cannot properly express that feeling. That is the tragedy not only of the Christians but also of De Levis the Jew who cannot adequately express himself in defence of his race. His emotional feelings for the Jewish race do not have that exuberance of expression which we come across in the utterances of Shylock the Jew. We can illustrate these remarks about the Christian characters of the play as well as the Jew from the following lines from the play. Canynge denounces the Jew, but his emotional fervour is without the fervour it ought to have. He says, "I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as Christ, mud will stick to him, unless the real thief is found. In the old days of sword, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this accusation, you will *both* go out of this room dead in the eyes of society, you for bringing it, he for being the object of it." De Levis is better in expression of emotion than Canynge, but even he does not come to the level of Shylock. His words, "Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money. Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I am certain I'm right." There is sincerity in what De Levis says, but the ring of emotional fervour is wanting in them.

We can turn to *Silver Box*. The utterances of Mrs. Jones and Mr. Jones lack emotional fervour. They speak in a manner which brings out their emotional excitement, but the words uttered by them are not hot like lava. They are cold like the burnt out cinders. Here is an example. Mr. Jones speaks his mind to the magistrate, "I have to do no more than wot be, as I'm a poor man. I've got no money and no friends—he's a toff—he can do what I can't." Mr. Barthwick's sympathy for the poor is also pitched in a subdued key. Here are his words, "This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I am bound to recognize the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired."

In *Justice* the expressions of Falder are emotional, but their expression is not fervid. Falder is a weakling and cannot give adequate expression to his feelings.

Many other examples can be given from Galsworthy's plays to show that his characters are emotional, but they cannot give full-blooded and fervent expression to their feelings. There are many characters in Galsworthy's plays who suffer silently without any protest. There are scenes where characters stand without saying a word, though the atmosphere is surcharged with emotional fervour and needs forceful expression. Galsworthy's characters are highly strung and emotional in their make-up, but they cannot adequately express their pent up feelings in a language that may take the audience off its feet, and win applause for their fervid oratory. The characters leave the impression not of emotional starvation, but lack of proper expression. More is meant in their utterances than meets the ear. They are suggestive, and their emotional speeches should be interpreted in a sympathetic manner. Then alone can we understand the full significance of Galsworthy's emotional characters.

Q. 112. Give a brief account of the main plays of Bernard Shaw (1856—1950)

Ans. Bernard Shaw has written a number of plays. The following are the prominent plays of the celebrated dramatist :—

*Widowers' Houses* (1892), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida*

(1895), *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), *You Never Can Tell* (1899), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899), *Captain Brass-Bound's Conversion* (1900), *Man and Superman* (1903), *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Heart Break House* (1919), *Back to Methuselah* (1921), *Saint Joan* (1923), *The Apple Cart* (1928), *On the Rocks* (1933).

Let us critically examine some of the plays.

#### 1. *Widowers' Houses* (1892).

Shaw's first play *Widowers' Houses* was not finished till 1892, although he had made an unsuccessful effort at dramatic collaboration with William Archer seven years earlier. This play is written on the subject of slum landlordism. Shaw himself describes it thus : "I perversely distorted it to be a grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism, municipal jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between them and the peasant people with 'independent' income who imagine that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives." This satirical invention of the author was combined with a good deal of farcical triviality with the result that a serious subject was treated with a degree of annoying non-seriousness. This play should be described as an economic treatise in dramatic form. The characters are mostly and intentionally represented as hypocrites and humbugs. The Englishmen brought out in this play are obtuse, thick-skinned, unimaginative and humourless. These Englishmen, like Cokane 'might be compared with the buffoons of an earlier tradition : the Vice of the medieval drama and the Fool of the Elizabethan before the Fool had been transformed by Shakespeare from a buffoon into a philosophic and poetic genius."

#### 2. *The Philanderer*.

It is a telling satire upon physical science, though enlivened with fine strokes of comedy. Dr. Paramore is a young strenuous physician, who has discovered a new disease, and is delighted when he finds people suffering from it and cast down to despair when he finds that it does not exist. In other words, it is a sharp exposure of the dangers of 'idealism', the sacrifice of people to principles. He points out that excessive idealism exists nowhere



so much as in the realm of physical science. The scientist seems to be more concerned about sickness than about the sick. This theme of Dr. Paramore's disease is at once a most fascinating philosophic thing in the play.

### 3 Mrs. Warren's Profession.

It is a play based on the theme of prostitution. G. Chesterton comments on it thus: "It is concerned with a cold mother and a cold daughter: the mother drives the ordinary dirty trade of harlotry; the daughter does not know till the late the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. The daughter, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an icicle of contempt, which is indeed a very womanly thing to do so. The mother explodes into pulverizing cynicism which is also very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping; the daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe the trade by which she lives. And beyond question the general effect of the play is that the trade is loathsome; supposes anyone to be so insensible as to require to be told of the fact. Undoubtedly, the upshot is that a brothel is a miserable business and a brothel keeper a miserable woman. The whole dramatic art of Shaw is, in the literal sense of the word, tragicomic; that is to mean that the comic part comes after the tragedy. On account of the theme of the play it was banned by the Censor of plays and aroused a storm of protest from several quarters."

### 4. Arms and the Man.

It was acted for the first time in April, 1894. It is an amusing exposure of the glory of war and romantic love. The story is based on an incident in a war between Bulgaria and Austria in 1885. The Petkoffs, represent an aristocratic Bulgarian family consisting of Major Petkoff, his wife Catherine and daughter Raina whose head is full of romance and who is in love with Sergius claimed to be a military hero. Into this circle enters a common soldier, Bluntschli, a Swiss, who has joined the Serbian army as a mercenary soldier. He has no illusions about war, places the naked truth about it when he happens to seek shelter in Raina's bedchamber one night from the ruthless shooting of the Bulgarians. "The Swiss soldier behaved as Sh

maintained a soldier actually does behave, not as the conventions of Victorian melodrama would have a soldier behave : the play exhibited what Shaw called "natural morality" as against the "romantic morality" of those who objected to it. The plot is cleverly developed to show that the hero of Raina's dreams, Sergius is really a humbug, and his so called military exploits and glory are mere sham. He is not only a false hero on the battlefield but also in love. Though in love with and engaged to Raina, he flirts with the servant-maid Louka. In course of time it is found out that Raina herself cares more for her 'chocolate cream soldier,' Bluntschli, than for her professed lover, Sergius. Thus Shaw tears the mask off the face of sentimentality surrounding war and the equally foolish approach to love. Shaw's satire is summed up in the words of Sergius, "Oh, war the dream of Patriots and heroes—a fraud, Bluntschli. A hollow sham, like love."

#### .. Caesar and Cleopatra.

*Caesar and Cleopatra* is a puritanical play based on war against romance and heroism. In this play Shaw has produced a play of artistic creation in the portrait of Caesar. Caesar is a Shavian hero. Shaw represents Caesar not so much as "best riding the earth like a colossus," but rather walking the earth with a sort of stern levity, lightly touching the planet and yet spurning it away like a stone. *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a noteworthy play from many points of view. It began a new way of handling historical subjects, material, informal, humorous, yet full of meaning. The play contains many brilliant scenes and fine phrases. There is no play of Shaw more certain to hold its own on the British stage. "This play does not aim at proving any general proposition, and comes much nearer to being a play than most of his works written in dramatic form."

#### 6. Man and Superman

With the appearance of this play in 1903, Shaw proved himself a fully matured dramatist. His apprenticeship in the realm of drama was over; and he was able to tackle the theatre and the dramatic form with unqualified success. In *Man and Superman*, observes Ward "the ideas are more memorable than the character, and there is little reliance upon stage situation; but the tremen-

dous stirring of moral and intellectual passion is compensation enough." Described by the author as "A Comedy and a Philosophy" this play was Bernard Shaw's earliest full statement of his conception of the way of salvation for the human race through obedience to the Life Force, the term he uses to indicate a power continually working upon the hearts of men and endeavouring to impel them towards better and fuller life. "Unlike Hardy's Immanent Will Shaw's Life Force is represented as a power making consciously towards a state of existence far more abundantly vital than anything yet experienced by mankind. But the Life Force does not purpose to work unaided: Men and women are required to act as willing and eager agents for the furtherance of its great work. The existing race of men, however (so Shaw thought in 1903) was too mean-spirited and too self centred to serve the Life-Force, which would consequently be compelled to supersede Man by a more effective instrument of its will—the Superman. The means likely to be adopted for the production of that higher type were suggested in *Man and Superman*, where woman is indicated as 'Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its achievement and Man as "woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest," that the Superman should be born to replace the existing, 'feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances."

#### 7. Heartbreak House (1919).

Shaw's doctrine of the Life Force is developed further in two plays—*Heartbreak House* and *Back to Methuselah* (1921). In *Heartbreak House* he gives forth a terrible warning that 'cultured and leisured Europe will meet its doom if it did not undertake the mission of the Life Force. This play, begun in 1913, proved to be prophetic. It was completed in 1919 and by that time Europe had witnessed the holocaust of the World War. A generation which ignored the purposes of the Life Force was like the drunken skipper to whom comes 'the smash of the ship on the rocks, the splintering of rotten timbers; the tearing of her rusty plates, the drowning of the crew like rats in a trap.'

#### 8. Back to Methuselah.

In *Back to Methuselah* Shaw once again considered the purpose of the Life Force and pronounced a great warning that

if Man did not come up to the mark he would be replaced by another set of beings. Shaw's doctrine in this respect was contrary of the theory of Natural Selection expounded by Darwin. Shaw wrote, "This does not mean that if man cannot find the remedy, no remedy will be found. "The power that produces Man when the monkey was not up to mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if man does not come up to the mark." What it means is that of man is to be saved, Man must save himself. "The play is pretentious and dull showing a most undramatic desire to reduce all human life to disembodied speculation." It lays emphasis on creative evolution.

#### 9. Apple Cart

In this play Shaw deals with the problem of monarchy in a democratic country like England. He comes to the conclusion that the attempt to do away with the institution of monarchy represented by King Magnus in the play will ultimately spell ruin in society. The king is necessary to exercise a check on the activities of democratic leaders. In this play Shaw is neither opposed to monarchy nor democracy but to capitalism, and his diatribes are directed against Breakages and Company that stands in the way of all social and economic progress. "*The Apple Cart* is one of the wisest and most genial pieces, wise not so much because of the political acumen of King Magnus as for the dicta on the art of self-sufficingness in the opening dialogue and on the art of human relationships in the interlude, which is also a passage of sparkling comedy rarely equalled in the modern English theatre."

#### 10. Cándida.

It is in some ways Shaw's masterpiece. It tackles a domestic problem and shows that it is not sentimentalism but intelligence that governs life. This explains why Cándida eventually chooses the strong man Morel and not the poet, Marchbank, her sentimental lover.

#### 11. John Bull's Other Island

In this play Shaw is directing his satire at the conventional Englishman, who is never so silly or sentimental as when he sees silliness and sentiment in the Irishman. Broadbent, the hero of the play, is an Englishman, who believes that he brings reason

in treating the Irishmen, whereas in truth they are all smiling at his illusions

"This play" observes Ward, "remains one of his most effective pieces, displaying his dramatic power-mastery of rhetoric and exalted prose, effective handling of stage situation, skill in depicting character and sense of comedy."

#### 12 Major Barbara.

It reveals the materialistic pessimism of Shaw. Here he depicts poverty as the epitome of all vices. 'People say that poverty is no crime ; Shaw says that poverty is a crime. It is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it, that it is the mother of all crimes of brutality, corruption and fear.' Here the dramatist shows that even the noblest enthusiasm of the girl who becomes a Salvation Army Officer fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist. The political philosophy of Major Barbara is essentially Marxist.

#### 13. On the Rocks.

In this latest play *On the Rocks* Shaw returns to the subject of democracy though he changes the metaphor and also thinks of new plots and plans of attack. In his comedy he shows how a programme of socialism is acceptable only to aristocrats and is rejected by the leaders of the proletariat. The play is a failure both as an exposition of Shaw's philosophy and as a work of art.

#### 14. Saint Joan.

*Saint Joan* is one of the greatest works of Shaw. Here he presents the life of the French girl St. Joan who defied British power and fought valiantly for the freedom of her country. Saint Joan is captured and is burnt as a witch. Later on the greatness of Saint Joan is understood by the people and she is canonised in the Christian Church. The play is on a great subject and has a grandeur of style fully worthy of it. The trial scene in this play is one of the greatest scenes in the whole of dramatic literature.

"In *Saint Joan* Bernard Shaw reaches a higher level than elsewhere because for once the grander emotions are involved and the theme is a universal one lending itself to tragic drama."

#### Other Plays.

*Getting Married* is a scathing criticism of home life as it

existed in Shaw's time. Shaw seeks to point out the evils of maladjustment in home life in this play. *You Never Can Tell* is a satire on the authority of parents. *The Doctor's Dilemma* is a skit on men of science. In *Andr cles and the Lion* Shaw pleads for drastic redistribution of wealth. *The Man of Destiny* is a historical play on the life of Napoleon. Contemporary social conventions are held up to ridicule in *Pygmalion* and Shakespeare forms the subject of *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*.

Q. 113. Give your estimate of Bernard Shaw as a Dramatist.

Ans. Bernard Shaw was one of the greatest dramatists of the 20th Century, and by some critics he is considered next to Shakespeare in the hierarchy of English dramatists. At the time when Shaw made his debut on the English stage, drama was slowly struggling to rise from the torpor into which it had fallen during the nineteenth century. The period between 1779 and 1876 is dramatically barren and hardly a play produced during this sterile period has survived except as a literary curiosity. It was Shaw's great contribution that he gave to English drama a new life-force which it had lacked even in the hands of revivalists like Arthur Henry Jones and Pinero. He created not only the new drama of the 20th century, the drama of ideas and problems but also prepared the audience ready to accord a hearty welcome to what the dramatists of the new age were intending to give to the public. He revolutionised the whole concept of drama as it was supposed to be in the earlier ages and made it essentially a medium of discussion and reform, rather than pure relaxation and fun. It was Shaw's great achievement that he gave the air of seriousness and purposiveness\* to drama without sacrificing the element of fun and gaiety that the audience hungrily craved for. He gave his philosophic pills a nice sugar coating of joyousness and fun.

Shaw had begun his career as a dramatic critic quite in

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\* 'I always have to preach. My plays all have a purpose' (Bernard Shaw).

the style of William Archer, but he failed to bring about the regeneration that he sought to introduce in the field of drama. "Finally, having for three a half-years made mincemeat of the sentimentalities and essential falsities that contemporary dramatists continued to offer to their convention-ridden audiences, and seeing no sign of a regeneration, he abandoned criticism, and, more from a sense of duty than vocation, set out to show that he could do what he had upbraided Pinero and his school of drama for not doing."\* Before turning seriously to dramatic production, Shaw tried his hand at fiction and wrote five novels; *Immaturity* (1879), *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cicely Byron's Profession* and *the Unsocial Socialists* (1883), which failed to achieve the desired success. These were regarded by Shaw as "The novels of my nonage" and their cold reception damped his enthusiasm for further production of works of fiction. He turned to drama as his saviour and made it the main forte of his literary career.

**Why did Shaw write dramas ?**

The failure of Shaw as a critic and as a novelist brought him to the field of drama, which was best suited to his genius. The subjective conflict constantly proceeding in the soul of Shaw between opposing elements, egoism and socialism, intellect and instinct, reason and emotion, demanded an objective treatment and for that purpose drama was the best medium. He had to create characters to express outwardly one or the other point of view that occurred to his mind. For this job the drama provides him the suitable medium. He believed that the stage was the finest instrument for the dissemination and discussion of ideas, far superior to the school and the pulpit. Since Shaw had many important things to say to his generation, he used the theatre as the vehicle for his thoughts. He accepted the theatre as he found it, and used it for the discussion of ideas teeming in his mind.

"His love for debating, in which he had shown how irresistible it was for him to counter his arguments himself if no one else would, influenced him towards choosing the kind of play in which the characters undertake the dual task of proposer and

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\* Lynton Hudson : *The Twentieth Century Drama*.

opposer."\* Shaw had at heart a bent for satire. Passing through almost exactly the same experiences as Dickens, he could not write a sympathetic study of the life of the London poor like *David Copperfield*. But he could pen satires burning with indignation like the *Widowers' Houses*. Verse and comedy are the two instruments of the satirist. If Shaw had lived in the days of Alexander Pope and the Heroic Couplet he would have probably written verse, but as he lived in the days of Oscar Wilde and the epigrammatic stage, he wrote plays, particularly comedies. His satiric genius gave a tilt to his dramatic art and made him a comedian rather than a tragedian in dramatic literature. But perhaps the predominating influence that urged Shaw to turn to the drama was the success of Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who seemed to Shaw a close parallel to his own genius.

Shaw—the dramatist of ideas.

Shaw had certain ideas to present to the public through the medium of his plays. "He saw things as they are and had the courage to tell in compromising language exactly what he saw. He thought for himself, resolutely refused to accept ready-made opinions, and judged solely on evidence or on logic. He set his mind free from prejudice, superstitions, illusions, and popular delusions."\*\* He had his original thoughts on contemporary problems as well as problems affecting humanity at large. He saw things with direct vision and altogether apart from the prejudice imposed by custom. He refused to be carried away by contemporary emotions by which the general public was swept off its feet. He had powerful and penetrating ideas to offer on a variety of subjects like slum landlordism, prostitution, natural Christianity, husband hunting, professional delusions and impostures, marriage, history, paradoxes of conventional society, questions of conscience, Darwinian evolution and Life-force. He fervently and fearlessly set forth his ideas in his dramas and hoped to convert the nation to his way of thinking through the medium of his plays.† Each drama of Shaw seeks to present his original ideas on the subject

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\* Dr A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

\*\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama

† 'I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion'—Shaw.



treated by him. For example, *The Widowers' Houses* sets forth his views on the subject of slum-land-lordism and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* on the subject of prostitution and brothels. *Candida* offers his views on marriage, *Man and Superman* on life-force and husband hunting, *Major Barbara* on Christianity, *Misalliance* on education, *Arms and the Man* on the subject of romantic love and war and *Apple Cart* on monarchy and democracy.

**Shaw as a Satirist, Iconoclast, Propagandist and Reformer.**

Shaw was essentially a satirist, like Ben Jonson, and the avowed object of his art as a dramatist was to break conventional idols and fetishes and bring about healthy changes in the body politic of our society ridding it of the insidious cancers eating into its vitals. Shaw never bothered about the glorification of art for the sake of art. "Shaw had no conception of the drama as a literary art form in which the total pattern of meaning is achieved cumulatively and completely by the language put in the mouth of the characters as they talk to and interact with each other." This is confirmed by his long and detailed stage directions, in which not only the action of his characters but their states of mind, emotions, tone or voice, and intentions are fully described as though in a novel. He never wrote for the mere glorification of art. "Art for art's sake is not enough. For art sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence," observed Shaw in one of his writings, and true to his statement he never wrote for the sake of art but mainly for reforming the evils running rampant in the society of his times. He subordinated his literary ability to a moral purpose. "He became the Knight of the Burning Pencil, a crusader whose appointed life-work was the endeavour to restore colour and light to England's once green and pleasant land."\* Through the mouth of Tanner in *Man and Superman* Shaw made his position clear as an iconoclast and reformer of the evils of our society. He stated through Tanner—"I have become a reformer and like all reformers an iconoclast. I no longer break cucumber frames and burn grass bushes. I shatter creeds and demolish idols."

"The giants at which he tilts" says Scott James, "are

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\* A. C. Ward : *Twentieth Century Literature*.

moral slavery, humbug, mental sloth, social apathy, superstition, sentimentalism, collective selfishness and all the static ideas which have not been consciously subjected to the tests of real life and honest thought." He behaved like a mountebank in his exposure of bad housing, bad education, bad conditions of labour, bad morals, and other social evils which troubled him so deeply. The objects of his satire include conventionalised religion and philosophy in *Androcles and the Lion* and in *Back to Methuselah*; social attitude towards sex relations in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Candida* and *Man and Superman*; military heroism in *Arms and the Man* and *The Devil's Disciple* and professional charity in *Major Barbara*. Shaw was not satisfied with mere demolition of established idols, but on the debris of the razed buildings, he sought to build new buildings with open air atmosphere. "He is the great destroyer of evil in our modern age, and out of his destructiveness he seeks to lead us toward a newer, fresher, and more constructive thought."†

Shaw remained a propagandist in favour of certain ideas which he cherished in his mind. He made propaganda in favour of certain ideals which he sought to realise in social life. But this does not apply to all the plays of Shaw. In some of his plays he is not at all a propagandist and a reformer. He has no axe to grind in such plays as *Fanny's First Play* and *You Never Can Tell*. They are not at all concerned with propaganda. In these plays Shaw gives himself entirely to the job of providing intelligent amusement. "He is not so much a dramatist, in spite of his propaganda, as an artist who has dramatised propaganda itself."\* "The Gadfly who stung society to the quick went on stinging, and even in extreme old age emerged from time to time to prick real or imaginary foes. But he left behind no savour of bitterness for the young as well as the old. He was the cheering, zestful, great-hearted veteran who loved the smell of the battle in the field of ideas, who, with an exhilarating smile on his face, was still happy to challenge and attack again"†

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† Allardyce Nicoll : *British Drama*.

\* J. W. Marriott : *Modern Drama*.

† Scott James : *Fifty Years of English Literature*

**Shaw's Plot Construction.**

"Shaw's ideas can never cease to form an important part of his dramatic legacy. Nevertheless it is as a dramatist upon the stage that Shaw demands primary consideration."\* It is as a dramatist that he has to be judged by his readers and the first consideration in this direction is the examination of his plots and his skill in plot construction.

Shakespeare had borrowed his plots from various sources, but he had never sacrificed the story for the sake of his ideas. Plot construction was well known to the great artist. A great artist had the skill of a seasoned master in the manipulation of his plots having several threads which stand in a harmonious pattern as in *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*. But Shaw, who is considered next to Shakespeare, paid little heed to the story or the systematic development of plot in his plays eschewing irrelevancies from the dramatic point of view. In the Postscript to *Back to Methuselah* Shaw declared, "When I am writing a play I never invent a plot. I let the play write itself and shape itself, which it always does even when up to the last moment I do not foresee the way out. Sometimes I do not see what the play was driving at until quite a long time after I have finished it." The plots of Shaw are loose, and the dramatist introduces scenes in his plays which do not seem to have any vital link with the main thread of the story. His stories ultimately dwindle into mere situations and episodes. In his later plays all sense of plot is lost and the dramatist just starts talking with the readers. He completely dispenses with the need of a story. *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* are little else but interesting talk. When the critics complained that they were not plays at all but "dramatized conversation," he retorted : "A play is anything which interests an audience for two hours and a half on the stage of a theatre."

**Absence of Action in Shaw's Plays.**

A dramatist who lays emphasis on talk and conversation in his plays cannot be expected to give *action* the prominence it deserves in drama. Action is wanting in many plays of Shaw, and whatever action is present is smothered by the sallies of wit and

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

bouts of intellectual swordsmanship. The want of action is made up by an extra dose of dramatic dialogue. "If the dramatic dialogue is good enough" says Joad, "what of the action? There is something faintly vulgar about the alteration of position of matter in space which is, after all what action is."\*

#### **Lack of Conflict in Shaw's Plays.**

Conflict, which has been adjudged by critics as the life-breath of drama, is lacking in Shaw's plays. Instead of the dramatic conflict the dramatist introduces mental conflict in his plays. His importance lies in the fact that he transferred conflict of modern drama from the physical to the mental plane. To quote A. C. Ward, "A great deal of critical disapproval of Shaw's plays has been based upon the supposition that they lack the primary element of conflict. If conflict in drama necessarily implies a clash involving either violent physical action or intense emotional disturbance, then conflict in that sense is often lacking in the Shavian drama. It is, however, intentionally lacking, and its place is taken by mental action, which to Shaw is far more exciting. For the conflict of passion Shaw substitutes the conflict of thought and belief or rather, he brings moral passions to the stage to break the long monopoly of physical and sensual passion."\*\*

#### **Shaw's Characters**

Shaw has enriched dramatic literature by creating a variety of characters drawn from all classes of people in our society. "After Shakespeare no English dramatist equals Shaw in the variety and vividness of his characters, though he lacks almost entirely that interest in the individual *person* which is one of Shakespeare's qualities." The characters of Shaw are representatives of certain ideas which the dramatist seeks to propound through them. Some of his characters are mere mouthpieces of his theories invented to supply a necessary contribution to an argument while others are really projections of his own personality. It is very nicely pointed out by Scott James, "that there was at least one human character that he could depict to the life, and that was his own. In half of his plays there is one human being who is copied from life and appears under different disguises, and

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\* C. E. M. Joad : Bernard Shaw.

\*\* A. C. Ward : Bernard Shaw.

that is the infinitely various yet always the same George Bernard Shaw."

If Shaw's characters are merely puppets standing for certain ideas, speaking their parts not as life but as Shaw's arguments dictate, how they give the air of verisimilitude, still less the less, which the enjoyment of drama requires. This is a pertinent question. Shaw's characters, inspite of being puppets and mouth pieces of the dramatist have life in them because "he is so witty, because his stage craft is good; and especially because he has prepared the minds of his audience by written prefaces to his plays which are far more convincing than the plays themselves."

"His characterisation sometimes lacks the power of fully convincing us, because it does not always arise from such immediate creative insight as does the general idea of the play, but is to some extent dependent on that idea for the nature and variety of its figures. But once started on their career, his people share the vitality of the whole even when that is a vitality not of action but of talk. They may, indeed, be carried away by the zest of the argument and talk too much like Shaw and not enough as individuals, but this only enhances the unity of the play and its dramatic effectiveness."\*

Shaw, inspite of making his characters talking machines, has been able to give some outstanding individual characters such as Bluntschli, Father Keegan, Shotover and Saint Joan who can well be placed in the gallery of signal individual characters in British drama. His Alfred Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, Tanner in *Man and Superman*, Larry Doyle in *John Bull's Other Island*, Magnus in *Apple Cart* are memorable additions to the national heritage. Some characters of Shaw are intensely vital, and stand on their own right as masterly creations of the great dramatist. Energy Straker, Laza Doolittle, Rummy Mitchens, and Brother Martin are really great creations. We may not come across Shaw's characters in the streets and buses, in the cinema hall and the public pub, but in their own world they are as 'live' as the characters of Dickens in their own world. Shaw's characters are never mere dummies or conventional types. They are lively,

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

vigorous and witty.

Shaw's portrayal of women is masterly. Shaw invented the modern woman before he discovered himself. "Women, above all, he read and presented with a cunning unromantic realism which suggests that, like the novelist Richardson, he understood women even better than men: to Saint Joan may be added among his many vividly realised women, Raina, Cleopatra, Candida, Ann Whitefield, Major Barbara, Jennifer Dubedat and Eliza Doolittle, to name only a few." In the opinion of Harrison, "Barring Candida and Lady Cicely (Captain Brassbound's Conversion) Shaw's women from Blanche, his heroine in *Widowers' Houses* to Vivie Warren in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, are distinctly unpleasant, practically unsexed women. Their bodies are as dry and hard as their minds, and even where they run after men, as in the case of Anne in *Man and Superman*, the pursuit has as much sex appeal as a time table. Whether such women ever existed is an open question."\*

"Shaw's men when they are popular heroes, are often pretentious weaklings. He pulls Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Caesar from their pedestals, and reveals them to us as human beings with all the frailties of the flesh. He laughs at the athletic type of socialist parson who, for all his popularity in the pulpit, is really a great baby. He pokes fun at the foreign missionary. He is amused by the Spanish bandit. He chuckles at the Prime Minister, the soldier, the aggressive Labour man and the devil."†

In two directions Shaw's characterisation had special attraction and power. He successfully evoked the sympathies of the readers in unattractive people like Mrs. Warren and Louis Dubedat. He created with enthusiasm characters of broad comedy like those of Dickens such as Candida's father Straker and Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle. In these humorous figures idiosyncracies are emphasised to create pure fun.

There were no conventional heroes or villains in his plays. Like the plays of Galsworthy, the dramas of Shaw hold the audience as the villain. David Daiches says, "And often the real

\* G. B. Harrison : Bernard Shaw.

† J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

villain is not a character in the play, but the audience. For the audience, the average playgoer represents that thoughtless complacent, sentimental society which, for Shaw, was responsible for so much distortion of vision and so much evil and suffering."

#### Shaw's Wit.

Shaw is the master of wit rather than emotion. He had the devastating wit of an Irishman with the penetrating logic of a Frenchman. He distrusts emotion and never allows his characters to run into emotional utterances emerging from the heart. His appeal is more to the mind than to the heart, and his wit wins us more than his emotional expressions occasionally slipping out from the lips of his tragic characters like St. Joan. "From the days of *Widowers' Houses* Shaw's wit sparkles through his plays. With *Arms and the Man* it began to have great prominence. Wit is the very essence of Shavian comedy, in which the dramatist, standing outside the world he creates, sees it with and impish detachment."\*

Shaw is the master in the field of comedy writing. He belongs to the great tradition in being a writer of comedy—often the comedy of manners. To the existing types of comedy, such as the Romantic comedy of Shakespeare, the satirical comedy of Ben Jonson, the comedy of manners, the comedy of intrigue, the sentimental comedy, and the comedy of humour, Shaw added the "comedies of purposeful fun." "His fun is something peculiar to himself, an effervescing bubbling-up eternally youthful and joyous exuberance of spirit. He is continually inverting ideas and poking fun—poking fun at us, at his audiences, at his characters, at ideas. Over all Shaw has thrown the mantle of his peculiarly dominating sense of fun, just as Shakespeare cast the radiance of his humour alike on Dogberry and Claudio."\*\*

"Shaw's comedy of ideas is full of life and fun; comedies like *Major Barbara* (1905), *Androcles and the Lion* (1913) and *Pygmalion* (1913) are entertaining as well as critical and stimulating; but all this comes from the sparkle of Shaw's mind, and not from a fully realized dramatic projection of a complex vision

\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

on life.”\*

### Shaw's Dialogue.

Shaw's dialogues are brilliant, flashy, sparkling and spontaneous. He is a master of dramatic dialogue. His characters are articulate and voluble in contrast to Galsworthy's characters and express themselves well in sharp and impressive dialogues. “He excels in brief, witty exchanges and, above all, in the handling of extremely long speeches when his characters put forward their carefully reasoned arguments. He had the art of making the long discourse as interesting and dramatic as action, and this was something new to the stage. His brilliance in this has never been surpassed.”\*\* “Shaw has done as much as any man to revolutionize stage dialogue. He has invented the dialogue of disquisition, and can make an argument as thrilling as a stand-up fight. When people complain, as they sometimes do, that there is no action in, say, *Getting Married* or *Too True to be Good*, they forget that intellectual action may be as dramatic as a battle. Thoughts can hit like bullets, emotions can explode like shells, and a word duel between a man and a woman can be more thrilling than throwing chairs about the room.”†

### Shaw's Place in English Drama.

Shaw is undoubtedly a great dramatist. “If greatness consists in being irreplaceable, Bernard Shaw's greatness is assured. It was not long before people began to talk about him as the English or Irish Moliere, or the Voltaire of the twentieth century, and undoubtedly he combines in himself some of the qualities of both these great men. Shaw's name will not be forgotten as long as their's are remembered, and what is best in his influence may well become part of our common human heritage.”‡

The fact is that Shaw remained an entertainer and a master of all the tricks of the entertainment trade and his wit and intellectual brilliance were never fully absorbed into a dramatic form of appropriate depth and scope. This is not to say that Shaw was a great writer whose plays do not fit into any accepted

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

\*\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

† J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

‡ E. Strauss : Bernard Shaw.



category, but rather that he was a dramatist of immense talent and prodigious wit whose limited view of the nature of literary art prevented him from seeing the limitations of his own artistic imagination and so from seeking a dramatic form which could contain all he had to say about men absorbed wholly into the dramatic texture."\*

"When all deductions are made, and when Shakespeare has been put at the head of the roll of English dramatists, who is to be placed second it not Shaw? Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Congreve, Webster, Tourneur Sheridan? The failings of any one of these are no fewer than those of Shaw, though they may be different failings; their achievements seem less than his. Not one of them directed and dominated the thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century as Shaw directed and dominated the thought of the early twentieth century in England and beyond. Not one of them was mixed by a blaze of moral passion, as Shaw was. Not one of them had a greater command of rhetoric or a more brilliant wit. Some of them were great poets—as Shaw was not; yet which of them commanded a better prose style than Shaw at his best. Shaw's place is undoubtedly next to Shakespeare."\*\*

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**Q. 114.** Give your estimate of Granville Barker (1877—1946) as a Dramatist and institute a comparison between Galsworthy and Barker as Realists, in modern drama.

**Ans.** Granville Barker was one of the prominent dramatists of the twentieth century, and he belonged to the group of Realists who sought to discuss realistically the social, political economic and industrial problems of the twentieth century. His plays are discussions of contemporary problems and his themes include the marriage conventions, the inheritance of tainted money, sex, and the position of woman. He is very serious in the presentation of the social problems, and the note of sobriety and seriousness imparts an air of heaviness to his work. His characters are well nourished at the feast of life and are life-like in the expression of their feelings.

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\* David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature.

\*\* A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

The main plays of Barker are *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899), *The Vosey Inheritance* (1905), *Waste*, (1907) and *The Madras House* (1910). In *The Marrying of Ann Leete* Barker's insistence is on the Life-Force theory propounded by Shaw. His George and Ann Leete faithfully carry out the command of life-force, and are opposed to the shams and conventions of a tradition-ridden society. *The Vosey Inheritance* deals with the problem of tainted money. Mr. Vosey, senior partner of a respected and prosperous firm of solicitors leaves plenty of money for his son Edward. Later on Edward comes to know that the money left behind by his father for him has been earned dishonestly by cheating and deceiving the clients. Edward is horrified at the prospect of inheriting this tainted money. He prefers poverty and bankruptcy to the tainted money left behind by his prosperous father. He is an idealist and an honest man and his opposition to his inheritance is well marked out. The play ends on a note of lofty idealism.

In *Waste* (1907) Barker deals with the problem of sex antagonism, and in *The Madras House* (1910) he concentrates on the discussion of women in modern society. We are shown the picture of a home in which there are six marriage-able girls living futile lives unless some eligible bachelors or widowers take them off their father's hands. The play possess the problem of marriage for women in aristocratic families.

Barker was a realist in the presentation of his problems, His characters and dialogues are natural, and he leaves the impression of a serious dramatist of the twentieth century.

Barker and Galsworthy are both of the same kidney. "Both hold strong views on the themes they chose to illustrate. Each revolted temperamentally,—Barker against the repression of the individual by the intimidation of Victorian convention, Galsworthy against the crushing of the individual by society. Each had a gospel to proclaim, Barker the doctrine of self-realization, Galsworthy the doctrine of tolerance. And even if they could have achieved complete impartiality they were far too clever play-wrights to overlook the fact that to dispense with all emotion is to eviscerate the drama. So, like every other instinctive dramatist, they concentrated on a certain aspect of life, and selected

incident and character. But they did try to reproduce this microcosm on the stage with the utmost verisimilitude.”\*

**Q. 115.** Write a note on John Masefield (1878— ) as a Dramatist.

**Ans.** John Masefield is not only a great poet, but also a great dramatist of the twentieth century. He has attempted a variety of plays, and has made experiments in domestic plays, historical drama, plays of supernaturalism and mysticism, and poetic plays. His plays exhibit his versatile genius as a dramatist. “Gifted with a high imagination, he is by spirit sternly classical; endowed with passion, no man is more clear-sighted and logical than he; full of the fantasy of the poetic genius, he is a confirmed realist; clinging tensely to the natural world, he is wrapped in the spirit of mysticism.”\*\*

In the sphere of domestic tragedy and realistic portrayal of life in a sombre vein, his *The Tragedy of Nan* stands on a higher pedestal than other plays belonging to this class. The story is one of unflinching realism, and pathetically presents the tragedy of a poor woman named Nan, who finds herself hard hit by tyrannical and callous social forces working against the underdogs of society. A note of sympathy is well marked out in the tragedy. It is more pathetic than heroic and seeks to win the sympathy of readers for those unfortunate victims of society who are repressed by cruel social laws. The other tragedies on the same pattern are *The Campden Wonder* (1906), *Mrs. Harrison* (1907). They are both unrelieved bourgeois tragedies, but are without the spark that gave a moving appeal to the *Tragedy of Nan*.

Among the plays of supernaturalism *Melloney Holtspur* (1923) deserves a high place. The play deals with supernatural forces. Melloney Holtspur moves in the world of spirits after her death, and leans like Rossetti's blessed Damsel from the bars of her spirit world giving blessings to her earthly lover.

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\* Lynton Hudson—*The Twentieth Century Drama*.

\*\* A. Nicoll—*British Drama*.

*Pompey the Great* (1910) is a historical play presenting the contrast between the idealism of Pompey and the realism of Caesar.

Plays dealing with religion and mysticism are *The Trial of Jesus* (1925) and *The Coming of Christ* (1928). These plays are saturated with religious mysticism and symbolism.

*The Faithful, A King's Daughter Good Friday* are romantic-cum-poetic plays and exhibit the other side of Masefield's genius.

Masefield is a dramatist essentially of the domestic school and in spite of his diversified excursions will be recognised in later years as a writer of domestic tragedies.

**Q. 116.** What is the significance of the work of Sir James Barrie (1860—1937) in modern drama?

**Ans.** Sir James Barrie was a prominent Scottish dramatist and was gifted with all those qualities that go to make a successful playwright—constructive imagination, expert craftsmanship, a mastery over dialogue, a sense of character portrayal, humour, pathos, and irony. The significance and importance of the work of Sir James Barrie mainly lies in the fact that at a time when drama was mainly occupied with themes of realism and problems of social life in the hands of Jones, Pinero, Barker and Galsworthy, he had the courage to break away from the new upsurge for naturalism and realism, and keep alive the claims of romance, fancy, fantasy and light hearted humour tempered with flashes of witticism. "He showed that naturalism was not the only way, and gave a very timely reminder that a play must do more than stimulate the brain; it must touch the heart. In an age of growing cynicism he guarded the guttering flame of romance and kept it from being quenched intellectualism."\*

Sir James Barrie kept studiously aloof from the world of drab and sordid realities and exploited with determination and professional assurance, the emotions, whimsies and sentimentalism implicit in the Scottish Kailyard tradition, and in so much, Victorian and Edwardian middle class feeling. He was quaint

\* Lynton Hudson : *The Twentieth Century Drama*.

and whimsical in the presentation of romantic life. He was inspired in his dramatic craftsmanship by a spirit which was akin to his own Peter Pan, 'an elusive spirit which preferred not to grow in this modern world'.

The main works of Barrie, in which romance, fantasy, whimsicality figure prominently are *The Professor's Love Story* (1894), *The Little Minister* (1902), *Mary Rose* (1902), *Quality Street* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *Admirable Crichton* (1902), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916), *Dear Brutus* (1917).

Except in the *Admirable Crichton* where Barrie tackles a problem of social life, in all other plays there is a break from the tradition which the playwrights were popularising in the Problem Plays. In *Peter Pan* Barrie creates a world of fairy romance appealing both to children and grown up persons. Peter Pan lives in the world of day-dreams and creates for himself the utopia of childhood. In *Dear Brutus* Barrie presents the mischievous pranks played by Puck on a number of English people who even in their old age seek to recapture the gaiety and mirth of their youthful days. *Rose Mary* deals with a strange and curious Hebridean legend about a girl who mysteriously vanishes into space, lives for sometime in a strange world of fantasy, and then comes back to live again her normal life in the midst of people who receive her without any consternation. *A Kiss for Cinderella* is the materialization of a dream in which the heroine finds herself in the midst of royal banquets presided by a king and a queen, seated on golden thrones.

Barrie was indeed "a skilled technician, who kept his head in an age of experiments. At a time when advanced drama threatened to degenerate into talk he never allowed his plots to stand still. His episodes grow out of each other with refreshing unexpectedness, yielding to crisp dialogue and contrasts of character. With rare insight he discovers that the theatre goes like himself, wanted the sincerity of childhood in an age of adult affectations. So he showed them more intelligibly and sympathetically than Proust. That is his title to literature."\*

\* Sherard Vines : A Hundred Years of English Literature.

**Q. 117. Write a note on the achievements of Sir William Gilbert (1836—1911) in modern drama.**

**Ans.** William Gilbert was another great dramatist of the twentieth century, who like Sir James Barrie, kept away from the discussion of social problems which had been brought out in their full glare by writers like Jones, Pinero, Galsworthy, Barker and Shaw. Gilbert and Sullivan worked together in the production of Savoy operas marked with comical extravaganza. In the plays of Gilbert, such as *Palace of Truth* (1870), *Broken Hearts* (1875), *Tom Cobb* (1875), *Patience* (1881), *The Mikado* (1885), there is plenty of whimsicality, and refined sense of witticism and humour. "His main tendencies were cynical, witty and satirical, with a decided leaning towards parody and burlesque; but to these he added a strangely poetic fancy and a delicate whimsical humour."\*

Gilbert was intellectually a witty writer and paved the way for Oscar Wilde and his satiric thrusts. He had a brilliant wit and used puns, quips, quibbles, epigrams and paradoxes in ample measure in his works. His operas and plays are highly entertaining. They are often thought of as delightful musical fantasies, and their charm will not grow stale.

**Q. 118. Write a note on the revival of the Comedy of Manners during the twentieth century and evaluate the work of the prominent comedy writers of this class.**

**Ans.** During the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century there was a revival of the comedy of manners which the Restoration comedy writers like Etherege, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Farquhar and Congreve had perfected in their times. The twentieth century revival of the comedy of manners is generally free from the taints of obscenity and immorality which had called upon the Restoration comedy the stern voice of condemnation at the hands of writers like Dr. Johnson and Macaulay. The twentieth century comedy bears a close relation to the Restoration comedy in its witticism and sparkling dialogues. The comedy had its heyday for a period of three decades and began

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\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

to show signs of fatty degeneration after the second world war. "It may return although it is doubtful whether the social conditions of the period after 1945 are as likely to encourage the display of theatrical wit as were those of the interbellum age; and even the most cursory knowledge of the theatrical history convinces us that for this kind of comedy to flourish the social atmosphere must possess certain qualities which are wanting in our times. The comedy of manners is a tender plant and will not bloom if cold winds are blowing."\*

Among the comedy writers of the twentieth century who did yeoman's service into the revival of comedy, the name of **Bernard Shaw** is certainly at the top. He was the pioneer in this direction and he sought to invest modern comedy with the same satiric vigour and reformatory aim which it had enjoyed at the hands of Ben Jonson during the Elizabethan age. Shaw was considerably influenced by Meredith's view of the comic spirit and made his comedies intellectually sharp and witty, aiming all the time at exposure of the evils rampant in our times. Shaw's comedies in spite of their witticism and humour are serious in tone and are instruments, not so much of entertainment, as edification and social reform. Shaw is deadly in earnest in his comedies. He administers sugar coated pills. The readers enjoy the sugar coating leaving the bitter taste of the pills.

**Oscar Wilde** (1854—1900) was another great comedy writer of our times, and though as witty as Shaw, he did not aim at reform or moral edification through his comedies. He was the main reviver of the comedy of manners, and it was his primary object to provide entertainment and artistic delight to his reader through his comedies. Wilde was an apostle of the theory of Art for Art's sake and was not inspired by Shaw's crusading enthusiasm to harness art for social regeneration.

The main characteristics of Wilde's comedies are the witticism and sparkling dialogues. Wilde did not care for coger plots. The plots of his comedies are melodramatic and replete with hackneyed situations. They are banal in their appeal. His characters also are little more than marionettes. But what makes

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\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

Wilde's comedies entertaining and lovable is Wilde's style; and David Diches correctly hits the nail when he says that 'stylization is the very *raison d'être* of Wilde's plays.' He brought to the theatre an acute and brilliant wit, while his care for style helped to clear the drama of verbiage and to make its dialogue keen edged and clean cut.

Wilde painted the picture of the elegant and refined upper class society in his five famous plays particularly in *Lady Windmere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1894), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and *Salome* (1896). These comedies are comedies of manners in the Sheridan tradition, aristocratic in their outlook, gay and flippant in their tone, and sparkling and vivacious in their style. Beautiful words and phrases flow out from Wilde's pen and we hardly bother about the plot or the progress of the story. "Indeed" says Marriott, "In all Wilde's plays the dialogue frequently puts the story out of mind. We don't care what happens only if the characters will keep talking."

Noel Coward is another great comedy writer of the twentieth century. His comedies are lighter in vein and satirical in content. "His unerring sense of theatrical effect, his wit and dance of dialogue, his sparkling presentation of the hurly-burly of bright young moderns and their disillusioned fantastic elders delighted play goers in play after play."\* His wit and flashes of scintillating dialogues are well presented in his comedies particularly in *The Red Trap* (1924), *The Vortex* (1924), *Fallen Angels* (1925), *Easy Virtue* (1926), *Bitter Sweet* (1929), *Private Lives* (1930), *Cavalcade* (1931), *Conversation Piece* (1934), *Tonight at Eight Thirty* (1936), *Blithe Spirit* (1941), *Present Laughter* (1943), and *This Happy Breed* (1943).

Somerset Maugham, the novelist, is also a comedy writer of repute, and he seeks to represent the life which he has seen and known for a number of years in his life. All his comedies are based on his observation of life. He believed that, "the foundation of drama is actuality. It must be natural above all things, and achieve the illusion of truth by reproducing the manners and

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.



customs of the day as the exigencies of the theatre permit. Maugham's comedies successfully catch the manners and ways of the upper class society. His comedies are better in plot construction and characterisation than Wilde's comedies, though he suffers in witticism as compared to his great compeer in the field of comedy. The main plays of Wilde are *A Man of Honour* (1903), *Lady Foredrick* (1907), *Mrs. Dot* (1908), *Jack Straw* (1908), *Home and Beauty* (1919), *The Circle* (1921), *Our Betters* (1917), *Constant Wife* (1927).

Sutro carried the artificial comedy of manners forward by producing a few plays : *The Walls of Jericho* (1940), *The Two Virtues* (1941). His plays have a sparkle only a few degrees less intense than Oscar Wilde's.

James Bridie, a Scottish dramatist, produced a number of comedies marked with youthfulness, romance, and gaiety. His plays are a peculiar mixture of argument, philosophy, violent action and whimsical fancy. In spite of certain structural weakness,\* his comedies hold us in thrall, for he has several gifts as a comedy writer which are well presented in his plays. His imagination, sharpness of intellect, and fine flow of language come out in all his plays. He is known to the readers by his *John Knox*, *The Sleeping Clergymen and Balfry*, *The Anatomist*.

Fredrick Lonsdale popularised the comedy of manners. His comedies are satirical in content and flashy in dialogue. He exhibits a technical skill in the handling of the dramatic material at his disposal. His main plays are *The Lost Mrs. Cheyney* (1925) and *Spring Cleaning* (1925).

The comedies of Ervine, J. B. Fagan, H. M. Harwood, A. A. Milne are quite delightful. All these dramatists have made notable contribution to the revival of comedy in our times.

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\* "A play of Bridie gives the appearance of being unfinished. It is more like a first draft, often in urgent need of revision and structural alteration." (Fredrick Lumley).

**Q. 119.** Write a note on the Irish Literary Theatre or the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and give an account of the Irish Dramatists who revolutionised the Irish Theatre Movement by their dramas.

**Ans.** Irish dramatists have played an important part in the history of English drama. From the middle of the eighteenth century down to the beginning of the twentieth, the chief additions to English drama were the work of Irishmen. Goldsmith, Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, and Bernard Shaw were Irish dramatists, and their contribution to English drama is substantial.

During the twentieth century, there was a stir among Irish dramatists to revive to old Irish drama and popularise Irish themes and legends in dramatic works. With the object of putting Ireland distinctly on the map of British drama the Irish National Literary Society was formed in Ireland by W. B. Yeats and a few other leading Irish dramatists in 1892. This society developed by 1903 into the Irish National Theatre Society and in the same year *The Abbey Theatre* was established with the aid of Miss A. E. F. Horniman, a rich English lady. The Irish Literary Theatre had the avowed object of dramatising Irish life; not the life of sordid realism but the Irish life of beauty and enchantment, myths and legend. No doubt there was among these dramatists a craze for the revival of Irish legends and myths, but they could not completely ignore the life of peasants and Irish country folk from their plays. There was, therefore, in Irish Theatre Movement in Dublin a combination of two motives. The first object of the dramatists was to revive old Irish life, and their second object was to give a new interpretation to the life and achievements of Irish peasants. The sponsors of this movement thus aimed at the revival of old Irish legends and mythologies as well as create a new school of native comedy centring round Irish folklore and representing Irish peasant life and character. "That imaginative idealism which has always characterized the Celtic races, that love of passionate and dreamy poetry, that only half-ashamed belief in the fairy world, all gave a particular tone to the plays produced at the Abbey theatre."\*

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\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

The prominent dramatists of the Abbey Theatre Dublin were W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, Lennox Robinson, T. C. Murray, Padric Colum, Edward Martyn, O'Casey and Lord Dunsany. We will briefly deal with the works and achievements of these dramatists.

**W. B. Yeats (1865—1939).**

The work of W. B. Yeats as a dramatist belongs to the Irish literary movement and the Abbey Theatre. Yeats was primarily a poet and it is quite natural that his dramatic work should have been imbued by the spirit of lyricism and poetic fervour. The dramas of Yeats can be divided into two groups. In the first group we can place plays dealing with Irish life in a straight forward manner without any symbolism or mysticism. These plays of this group are *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), *Cathleen in Houlihan* (1902), *The King's Threshold* (1904), *The Hour Glass* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *At the Hawk's Well* (1917) and *The Cat and the Moon* (1926). In the second group we place Yeats's mystical and philosophical plays like *Cavalry* (1920), *The Resurrection* (1931), *Purgatory* (1939) and *The Death of Cuchlain* (1939). The plays of this group are symbolic in character. One needs some understanding and knowledge of Yeats's symbolic system to grasp them fully in all their niceties. These symbolic plays have a haunting suggestiveness about them and are highly stylized in a manner reminiscent of the Japanese 'No plays.' The language is colloquial and ritualistic; and the presentation of thought is enigmatic.

W. B. Yeats has no doubt left a rich legacy in dramatic field. Yet he did not have the gifts of a great dramatist. He was a greater poet than a dramatist, and poetry dominates his plays. There is little or no attempt at characterisation in his plays, and his characters are his own mouthpieces giving expression to his poetic ideas in a dignified manner. The plays no doubt present a love for old Irish legends and folk songs, tales of supernaturalism, angels and demons, but they lack action and sound characterisation. That is their weakness. They do not create the "illusion of possible people behaving credibly and using an appropriate speech medium."

The popularity of Yeats's plays, "depended more upon poetic charm and strangeness than upon dramatic power. Essentially a romantic lyric poet, he did not move with ease in the dramatic form."\* In the opinion of A. Nicoll "Yeats may be regarded rather as a lyric poet than as a playwright. His delicately fragile melodies and his esoteric mysticism alike tend to weaken the theatrical element in his dramas."

Lady Gregory (1859— 932).

She is known as a comedy writer dealing with Irish life and folk lore in a language that is characteristically Irish. Though her dialogue may not be as remarkable as Synge's, yet there is a charm in her presentation of Irish characters. Her main works are *Irish Folk History Plays* (1912), *New Comedies* (1913), *Seven Short Plays* (1909), *The White Cockade* (1914), *The Caravans* (1917), *The Wonder Plays* (1922), *Three Last Plays* (1928).

John Millington Synge (1871—1909).

J. M. Synge was the greatest dramatist in the rebirth of the Irish Theatre. He played an important part in giving to Irish life both in its tragic and comic aspects, a tangible form and shape in his plays. He studied life objectively in its beauty, its comedy and its tragedy, and gave expression to his feelings in a language that is poetical, rich and natural. "His plays are written in prose, but they have rhythms and cadences of poetry springing from the natural idiom of the peasant. This speech, rich in natural music and full of vivid imagery, is increased in power by its compression, and by the simplicity which is only achieved by much revision. Synge's style has the vitality of the great genius."†

The main plays of Synge are *The Shadow of Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Jiker's Wedding*, *The Well of the Saints* (1907), *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Diedre of the Sorrows* (1910).

*The Shadow of the Glen* is a comedy dealing with Irish peasant life. It is based on an old folk tale representing the faithlessness of an Irish woman to her husband. *The Riders to*

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

† E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

*the Sea* is a pathetic and grim tragedy in one Act, and brings out the life of the fisherfolk living in the west coast of Ireland in all their emotional intensity. The sea takes a heavy toll of life and the old lady Maurya loses all her sons and husband in the sea. Hers is a pathetic lot, and tears come out as we read this play. The play has grand, stark simplicity and a controlled intensity of feeling which are most impressive. *The Well of the Saints* is a fantastic comedy, and *The Playboy of the Western World* excels it in riotous fun and comic vitality. Round the character of the play boy Christy Mahon, Synge builds "a riotously funny comedy, full of spontaneous vitality, which gives an excellent, if satirical picture of the Irish character." *The Playboy* gives an impressive representation of Irish peasant life and character and is full of striking and beautiful phrases heard by the dramatist on the roads from Kerry to Mayo. *The Dedre of the Sorrows* is based on an old Irish legend in which themes of love and death are tragically yet gloriously interwoven.

**Lennox Robinson (1886— ).**

Lennox Robinson made a departure from the main trend of Irish playwrights by presenting realistic themes instead of making excursions into the world of Irish mythology and legends. He is primarily the writer of comedies verging on farce and caricature. His main plays are *The Clancy Name* (1908), *The Cross Roads* (1909), *Harvest* (1910), *Patriots* (1912), *The Dreamers* (1915), *The Lost Lender* (1918), *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1920), *The Round Table* (1924), *Crabbed Youth and Age* (1924).

**T. C. Murray**

In the plays of Murray, we have poignant studies of Irish peasant life. His main works are *The Wheel of Fortune* (1909), *Birthright* (1913), *Maurice Harte* (1912), *Spring* (1918), *The Briery Gap* (1918), *Aftermath* (1921).

**Padric Colum**

With Robinson and Murray, the contribution of Padric Colum should also be taken into account. "He took Irish problems realistically and seriously but could see the humour too of Irish characteristics even when deploring the way in which the towns, by their attractions, were emptying the Irish countryside of young people." His main works are *The Kingdom of Youth*

(1902), *The Land* (1905), *The Fiddler's Home* (1907), *Thomas Muskettry* (1910).

"An air of imaginative beauty passes over the whole, so that things spiritual and things material seem to meet in a common harmony. At the same time Mr. Column's work is not by any means fanciful. His methods are at bottom as realistic as are those of his two contemporaries mentioned above"\*

**Edward Martyn.**

He is an Irish playwright of the school of Synge. Unflinching realism is united with a vivid poetic imagination in his plays. His main plays are *The Heather Field* (1899), *Meave* (1900). These plays are marked with the spirit of poetry and supernaturalism though they are based on realistic setting.

"Martyn's real strength is seen to lie in this strange union of reality and of the supernatural. Few dramatists have succeeded as he did in welding together into a complete whole these two spheres. If he is mystically inclined in *Meave*, he sinks to sordid actuality in *Grangacolman*. If his supernatural atmosphere is perfectly achieved in *An Enchanted Sea*, it is somewhat vitiated in the comic atmosphere of *The Dream Physician* (1940). No other writer of this time, save perhaps Sir James Barrie, had quite the same power of uniting these two contraries, although in the works of Lord Dunsany, a "similar union, with a different purpose, is masterly attained."\*\*

**Lord Dunsany. (1878— )**

He is the Irish dramatist who has succeeded in producing an atmosphere of awe, fear and supernaturalism in his plays. He has separated himself from the school of Synge and Yeats in not seeking to present Irish life, but the life of oriental lands. His main works are *The Glittering Gate* (1909), *The Gods of the Mountain* (1911), *A Night at an Inn* (1916), *The Queen's Enemies* (1916), *The Laughter of the Gods* (1919), *If* (1921).

"Dunsany does not belong to any school of drama. He has created a kind of play which deals with the most fantastic in a style which exactly suits them—a highly imaginative prose which produces the effect of poetry. He has extraordinary inventiveness

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\* A. Nicoll : *British Drama*.

\*\*Ibid

in oriental nomenclature, and his literary style is excellent, being inspired by Bunyan and the Bible. He rarely attempts long plays. He has probably found, like Mr. Sladen-Smith who seems to be the only other playwright to attempt fantasy in this vein, that the short play is the best medium for his peculiar kind of theme."\*

#### O'Casey (1884— )

O'Casey was a worthy successor of Synge. He presented Irish life, not the Irish life of the Aran Islands, but the life of slums of Dublin bringing out all the sordidness and drunkenness of the Irish men and women. "His background, however, was not the Aran Islands but the slums of Dublin, crowded noisy tenements where women quarrelled and loafers drank and the tragic violence of civil war was ever at hand."\*\*

O'Casey's first play *The Shadow of a Gunman* brings out the slum tenements of Dublin in their crowded squalor. It reveals the bloodiness of the Anglo-Irish war of 1920. This play was produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1923. The next play *Juno and the Paycock* was produced in 1924. It is a political play dealing with the execution of a youngman by his Republican comrades who suspected him of treachery. *The Plough of Stars* (1926) also deals with the cruel and brutal folly of civil war. *The Silver Tassie* combines the naturalistic and expressionistic methods, and the skill with which the dramatist allows the one to drift into the other is really praiseworthy. "In the war scenes of *The Silver Tassie*, O'Casey tried to communicate the soldier's reaction to the blood and sweat of war in a way that conveyed the universality of the experience. For this purpose he adopted a mixture of chanted verse and stylized prose put into the mouths of nameless choruses of soldiers wounded stretcher bearers."† The other plays of O'Casey *Within the Gates* (1933), *The Star Turns Red* (1940), *Purple Dust* (1940), *Red Rose, for Me* (1946), *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946), *Cockadoodle Dandy* (1949) do not have the same intensity as his first three plays though the magic of language still gives them their enlivening touch.

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\* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.

\*\* A. S. Collins . English Literature of the 20th Century.

† Lynton Hudson : The 20th Century Drama.

The plays of O'Casey are about Irish life and the tragedy and comedy of this life is well brought out in dialogues, which are vivid, racy and rhythmical. In O'Casey comedy and tragedy sit cheek by jowl. "Comedy is seldom long absent, yet one can never forget the grim, underlying sadness. He draws what he sees with a ruthless objectivity and an impressionistic vividness of detail."

"The characters of O'Casey are weak, they are crude and pitiable. They are comic creatures speaking a rich lingo of the Dublin slums. They strut about, boasting, singing, quarrelling, drinking with unflagging vitality."

**Q. 120** Give a brief account of the Provincial Repertory Theatre and the Manchester School of Dramatists in our times.

**Ans.** The Provincial Repertory Theatre in England like the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, owed much of its success to the efforts of Miss Horniman (1860—1937) who out of sheer disgust for the Dublin performances started a repertory theatre of her own at Manchester in 1907 which she ironically named the Gaiety Theatre. It was here that the dramatists of the Manchester School of drama, headed by Miss Horniman, got the proper opportunity for the exhibition of their dramatic skill. The main dramatists of the Manchester School of drama are Stanley Houghton, St. John Hankin and St. John Ervine. These dramatists of the Manchester School intended to produce intellectual drama ; but failed to come up to their expectations. Instead of the intellectual drama we have the drama of the industrial life of Manchester. The dramatists of the Manchester Repertory Theatre sought to produce realistic problem plays in the new tradition. "Choosing generally a background of the industrial or business world, these playwrights dramatised stories which showed rebellious youth striving against repressive parents, the clash of man and master, the stupidity of convention, the needless unhappiness caused by difference of social class, and the emergence of bold independent womanhood."\* In the dramas produced by the dramatists of the Manchester School we have a

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.



clear and photographic picture of the social environment and industrial life of the people of Manchester. The young dramatists of the Repertory Theatre were considerably in the grip of the life they knew intimately. These young repertory playwrights—Hughton, Hankin and Ervine, “tended to restrict their interest to the narrow field of man’s relationship to his social environment ; they limited his horizon to four walls of the suburban parlour where the glass gaseliers, the innumerable China ornaments, the antimacassars and wax fruit were symbolical of the outmoded shibboleths of middle class morality.”\*

“The repertory movement was not only an attempt to free the theatre from the dictatorship of the financier and the actor-manager ; it was also inspired by definite theories of dramatic art. (1) The ‘long-run’ system was regarded as injurious to both the play and the players, since it led to a mechanical style of acting that deadened the mind of the player and made him a machine instead of a sensitive instrument ; the result being a coarsened interpretation of the play. (2) The repertory system was based upon the team principle. There were no permanent ‘stars’ among the actors : the Hamlet of one performance might be a second murderer in the next. (3) Under the old system, theatre managers ‘called in’ scene-painters, costumiers, composers, lighting experts, and others, to carry out certain separated pieces of work. The repertory system created a corporate art of the theatre—an organic whole, not a casual assemblage of disunited parts. (4) Most important of all for dramatic literature was the fact that repertory directors recognized that a play might attract only comparatively small audiences. Under former conditions such a play had practically no chance of production, since, if any profit could be expected from it. But in the repertory theatres a few performances of a play with a limited appeal were balanced financially by the production of plays of a more popular type.”\*\*

The most successful repertory experiment in London was that conducted at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907 by J. E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker : Vedrenne as the man of affairs

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\* Lynton Hudson—The 20th Century Drama.

\*\* A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

Barker the man of the theatre. During that Court season thirty-two plays (new and old, native and foreign) were staged. The outstanding feature was the unanticipated popularity of Bernard Shaw. Eleven of his plays were produced, and these accounted for 701 performances out of a total of 938 during the season. The Vedrenne-Barker programme included, also, plays by Granville Barker himself (*The Voysey Inheritance*), John Galsworthy (*The Silver Box*), Ibsen, Euripides (in Gilbert Murray's translations), Maeterlinck, John Masefield, St. John Hankin, and others. Much that is best in contemporary drama came from the Court Theatre season."\* Let us briefly examine the work of the Manchester playwrights.

#### **Granville Barker (1877—1946)**

Barker, whose work has been discussed separately in another question was a dramatist who contributed a lot to the Repertory Theatre. He began his career by producing three Shakespearian plays—*A Winter's Tale*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night* in an original manner. Through his plays the audience heard for the first time Shakespeare as he should have been heard.

In later years Barker produced realistic-cum-idealistic plays, the chief of them being *Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899), *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), *Waste* (1907) and *The Madras House* (1911).

#### **Stanley Houghton (1881—1913).**

Stanley was a writer of comedies and his fame as a dramatist is based on *The Dear Departed* (1908), *The Muster of the House* (1910), *Fancy Free* (1911); *The Younger Generation* (1910) and *Hindle Wakes* (1912). In these plays he deals with the revolt of youth against established authority. He paints the pictures with realism though not in such hard colours as Miss Baker's plays.

#### **St. John Hankin (1869—1909).**

Hankin, who died in 1909, is known by his *The Two Mr. Wetherboys* (1903), *The Return of the Prodigal* (1905), *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907) and *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908).

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\* A. C. Ward—*Twentieth Century Literature*.

Hankin, like most of his contemporaries was a dramatist of ideas. His plays throw considerable light upon the society of his age. His understanding of human nature was in the mass and hence he failed to probe the heart of his individual characters. He lacked emotional fervour and sympathetic outlook of Galsworthy. His cynicism comes out prominently in his plays. "In general, we may say that all of Hankin's plays, well constructed as they are in the main, lack naturalism, and his stage figures, seem to us rather invented than felt."\* "His plays lack both wit and the sense of life."†

St. John Ervine (1883— )

Ervine will be remembered by his *Mixed Marriage* (1911) and *Jane Clegg* (1913), *John Ferguson* (1915), *The First Mrs. Fraser* (1929), *Robert's Wife* (1937). He is recognised as the greatest of the Manchester or repertory dramatists. His method is strictly realistic, and like Houghton he loves to deal with the hard conventions of a narrow society. He gives expression to the class war and the narrow prejudices of a convention ridden society. In his plays there is conflict between the settled views of middle age and the predatory instincts of the young. The dramatist glorified middle age at the expense of youth. His plays would have "carried more conviction if it had been made clearer that youth, even when most self-seeking has a point of view that should in fairness be ably and fully expressed in any play in which youth is a chief protagonist." "The greatness of Mr. Ervine's work lies in his creation of stern and dignified characters. Few of his contemporaries can equal him in this."\*\*

Allan Monkhouse (1858—1936).

Monkhouse produced a few plays of real charm. Among his plays the pride of place has to be given to *Mary Broome*, (1911), *The Education of Mr. Surrage* (1912), *The Grand Cham's Diamond* (1924) and *First Blood* (1926).

After Dublin and Manchester, Birmingham produced a repertory dramatist of wide fame. John Drinkwater (1882-1927) produced his plays at the Birmingham theatre. A study of his

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\* A. Nicoll—British Drama.

† David Daiches—A Critical History of English Literature.

\*\* A. Nicoll—British Drama.

plays will be made separately later on.

"The repertory drama did much to popularize the dramas of ideas. It also helped to create a new school of naturalistic acting, which, while it was excellently adapted to the crook plays and pert comedies of the twenties has impoverished the theatre by its inability to give the natural reticence of life the necessary expressiveness of art."\*

**Q. 121.** "Perhaps the most hopeful and promising of all movements in the English stage of to-day is the rapid development of the historical play." (A Nicoll) In the light of this remark evaluate the work of the historical dramatists of the 20th Century.

**Ans.** The Historical drama of the 20th Century is of great significance and importance in the dramatic literature of the modern age. In the words of Clifford Bax, the celebrated historical dramatist of our times, "The historical dramatist stands, in relation to the playwright of modern life, somewhat as a portrait painter does in relation to a photograph. He gives or tries to give the essentials of human emotion and experience, not an exact rendering of somebody's actual speech but an impression of what somebody is feeling." The historical dramatist is a little different from the dramatists of realism and naturalism, and it appears to be his effort, "to escape from the trammels of naturalism and to bring back something of poetic expression to the theatre."

Among the dramatists who popularised historical plays the name of Bernard Shaw should certainly be placed at the top. He wrote *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *St. Joan* and blazed the track for others to follow. John Ervine sought to bring Shakespeare's characters back to life in his historical plays particularly in *The Lady of Belmont* (1924).

It was John Drinkwater (1882—1937) who really made a solid contribution to historical drama by his four plays *Abraham Lincoln* (1918), *Mary Stuart* (1921—22), *Oliver Cromwell* (1922) and *Robert E. Lee* (1923). In each one of these plays there is a central dominating personality standing heads and shoulders over the multiplicity of individually delineated characters. These

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\* Lynton Hudson—The Twentieth Century Drama.

historical plays of Drinkwater are not merely chronicle plays focussing all attention on events and external happenings, but plays of ideas, presenting problems of human life in a dramatic form. In *Abraham Lincoln* the problem set forth is whether a hero like Lincoln should pursue his ideals with unflinching determination or yield to external pressure and give up war for ensuring peace. *Oliver Cromwell* and *Robert Lee* "subordinate the presentation of history to a formal problem and in *Mary Stuart* we have a subtle study of moral, social question, that of woman's or of a woman's soul." Mary Queen of Scots stands for a woman who seeks to find all fine qualities of character in one single lover. Her ideal is very high and it is difficult to realise it in life. The tragedy of Mary Stuart is, in fact, the tragedy of idealism and lofty ambition.

**Clifford Bax (1886 -).**

He is the author of several historical plays such as *Mr. Pepys* (1926), *Socrates* (1930), *The Venetian* (1931), *The Immortal Lady* (1931) and *The Rose without a Thorn* (1932). *Socrates* lacks action but it clearly unfolds the Socratic method of discussion. This play is philosophic in tone and is 'chastely poetic in form.' *The Venetian* is lyrical and stands poles apart from *Socrates*. *The Rose without a Thorn* is his best play. Here neither we have the exuberant lyricism of the *Venetian* nor the philosophical intensity of *Socrates*. In this play the 'author has set himself to develop characters within a pattern, based on historical fact, but shaped by his imagination. This play is assuredly one of the most important and beautifully constructed historical dramas of our times.'\* In the matured opinion of Allardyce Nicoll, "Mr. Bax is one of those dramatists of this generation whose plays will live. His effective treatment of character, his skilful wielding of material, and his delicate sense of style give prime distinction to his work."

**Ashley Duke (1885—)**

He is known for his historical play *The Man with a Load of Mischief* (1924). It is not exactly a historical play, but the word historical "is used to include costume plays of any kind and is not

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\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

restricted merely to dramas in which historical figures are the chief characters." What signalises *The Man with a Load of Mischief* is its beautiful prose style, and 'the delicately polished and jewelled prose dialogue' in which it has been presented for the delight of the readers. The story in this play is not at all significant. What attracts us is the style of the author. The same stylistic beauties are to be found in his other plays-*Five plays of Other Times*. *One More River* (1927) is a light comedy in a light blank verse. He is a craftsman and a stylist, described as 'elegant' by *The Morning Post*.

**Rudolf Besier (1878—1942).**

In his *Barrets of Wimpole Street* Besier recreated the Victorian atmosphere with great fidelity choosing for his characters the poet Robert Browning and his love with Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "In Besier's study of poetic passion and strange perverted instinct the plot develops in melodramatic form, with frail heroine in villain's power and noble hero prepared to overcome all obstacles in order to win her love." Biographical fact is here a little more strained and certainly more emotionalized than in *The Lady with the Lamp*.

Among the other historical dramatists of the age mention is well deserved for the works of Shane Leslie who brought out *The Delightful, Diverting and Devotional Play of Mrs. Fitzherbert* (1928), Miss Joan Temple who in *Charles and Mary* (1930) deals with the life of the two figures of literature-Lamb and his sister Mary; Conal O Riordan who produced *His Majesty's Pleasure* dealing with the period of Henry IV; Edward Thomson who wrote the Indian legend of *Krishna Kumari* (1924); Howard Peacey who won recognition by his *Warren Hastings* (1928), *El Dorado* (1925) and *The Fifth of November* (1924); G. D. Gribbe who signalised his career by writing *The Masque of Venice* (1924) "which, although not historical is, sufficiently removed from the ordinary life around us to partake of the impression which it is the aim of the historical dramatists to produce." Arthur Vane who wrote *Outward Bound* (1923) and Laurence Housman who

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\* A. Nicoll—British Drama.

produced *Possession* (1921), *God Bless Her* (1922), *The Comforter* (1922) and *Victoria Regina* (1935).

**Q. 122.** Write an essay on the Poetic Drama and dramatists of the twentieth century.

**Ans .** In the early years of the twentieth century poetic drama could not gain much ground for most of the dramatists of this period like Barker, Galsworthy, Shaw, were more interested in the presentation of the social and economic problems of their times in a realistic manner than in making excursions to a land of poetic enchantment in their poetic plays. The drama in their hands ceased to be the representation of 'emotional reality' and became a handmaid of social criticism. The use of flowery language in realistic plays was out of place, and drama, dealing with social problems, was prosaic rather than poetic in the early decades of the twentieth century.

A change was noticed with the passage of time, and the dramatists who followed the early realists, were fascinated by the glamour and enchanting loveliness of poetic plays, and T. S. Eliot prepared the ground for them by stating that 'the craving for poetic drama is permanent in human nature'. Eliot emphasised the ability of poetic drama to capture the elusive in life and make it delightful and interesting. Twentieth century poetic drama has assumed different forms and shapes in the hands of different dramatists. Poetic dramas have been written on a variety of subjects. Some plays have been written on the glorification and exaltation of religion and the church, while a good many of them have atheism and denunciation of God and priests as their subjects. Some poetic plays are symbolic and mystical in character and quite a large number of them have Celtic mythology and Irish life as their subjects. Some plays have oriental grandeur and are inspired by oriental setting and splendour, while others have aesthetic enjoyment and glorification of sex-urge as their main spring. Thus we have a wide variety of poetical plays in the twentieth century and a large number of dramatists have preferred this art form to realistic or naturalistic plays.

Stephen Phillips (1864—1915) was among the earliest of the poetical dramatists of the modern age. He produced five poetical plays between 1900 and 1908. His main works are *Herod*, *Ulysses*, *Nero*, *Faust* and *Paolo and Francesca*. Phillips tried to revive the old Elizabethan traditions in poetic drama. Ernest Reynolds in *Modern Poetic Drama* has denounced Phillips for his decadent love for the old Elizabethan themes. In his opinion, "all that Phillips really did was to make the dying bones of pseudo Elizabethanism into a slightly more hollow rattle than Tennyson had done in *Queen Mary*." This criticism against Phillips has some validity when it is applied to *Herod*, and other plays, but it does not at all apply to *Paolo and Francesca*, which has been praised and applauded for its poetic beauty and bewitching charm. Even that confirmed antagonist of poetic drama, William Archer, paid rich tribute to Phillips in the *Daily Chronicle* when he wrote about this play—"A thing of exquisite poetic form yet tingling from first to last with intense dramatic life Mr. Phillips has achieved the impossible." Thus Phillips cannot be summarily dismissed as a simple imitator of Elizabethan rattle. Though he sought to reintroduce the old Elizabethan force and fire by the sonority of verse, yet his poetic plays failed to make much impression.

Oscar Wilde waved a new spurt to poetic drama by making it symbolic and aesthetic in characters. His claim as a writer of poetic drama has to be recognized particularly by his two plays *Salome* and *The Duchess of Padua*. Though Wilde had written comedies in prose, such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *A Woman of No Importance*, yet the play which Wilde himself considered 'a poetic, dramatic masterpiece,' is the controversial *Salome*. It is a symbolic play and here Wilde unconsciously worked against naturalist concepts. The play, in its language and atmosphere, is essentially anti-naturalist and being anti-naturalist is the first step towards a poetical play. The Princess Salome has been represented as a queen of beauty and Tetrarch is fascinated by her ravishing charms and looks at her with 'his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids.' The play is quite successful and has a distinctive place of its own in the poetic drama of the present age. In *The Duchess of Padua*, Wilde



marched a step ahead and advanced further in his technique against naturalism. *The Duchess of Padua* is a curious combination of Elizabethan and his own aesthete's outlook and the entire work is in blank verse. The theme is the usual Italianate subject of murder, usurpation and revenge. Wilde successfully started the reaction against naturalism and paved the way for symbolism. Between Wilde's *Salome* and the Abbey-dramatists, the main technique tried out has been 'symbolism'. It reached its culminating point in the hands of William Butler Yeats.

Davidson was another great dramatist who enriched poetic drama by his *The Theocrat* and *Mammon Trilogy*. The importance of Davidson in the history of 20th century poetic drama lies in the fact that instead of concerting his poetic muse to the service of religion and devotion to God, Davidson turned the scales upside down and tried to build a poetic theatre on non-Christian, anti-religious and materialistic presupposition. Davidson developed his fascination for matter, and denounced dogmas and principles of the Church. He felt a repulsion towards religion, and glorified the individual and sex impulses.

The modern poetic drama had considerably been influenced by the Orient, and in James Elroy Flecker we have an exhibition of the oriental splendour and magnificence in modern poetic plays. Flecker's *Hassan* is an oriental play remarkable for all the splendour and majesty with which the East is associated. *Hassan* is the product of a Romanticist, and seeks to capture the spirit that pervaded the Eastern countries. *Hassan* is an oriental fantasy, sparkling with wit and richly visual imagery of the east. Another romantic dramatist influenced by the oriental theatre was Dr. Gordon Bottomley. 'In his youth, he was an ardent admirer of Rossetti in whom he found

*The lost Italian vision, the passionate  
Vitality of art more rich than life,  
More real than the day's reality.*

Later he rejected the misty world of symbolic shapes and wrote a number of plays in imitation of the poetic spirit of Shakespeare. He was one of the pioneers in modern English choric drama. His *Culbin Sands* is a remarkable play and has a place of its own in the revival of romanticism in modern

drama.

John Masefield, the poet laureate, made creditable contribution to poetic drama by writing attractive religious plays: *Good Friday*, *The Trial of Jesus*, *Easter : A Play for Singers* and *A Play of St. George*. These religious plays are most interesting in view of the treatment of the well-known theme of the trial and crucifixion of Christ. The realism which Masefield introduced in poetry is conspicuous by its absence in his poetic plays and they seek to establish the tradition of faith in modern drama against the Nihilism of Davidson. Masefield's poetic plays have beauty as well as romanticism in them. He is emotional and exuberant, and there is something childlike and unsophisticated in his attitude towards the emotional states of human life.

Laurence Binyon sought to revive the old Greek world of romance and loveliness in his poetic plays particularly in *Paris and Oenone*. In this work Binyon goes back to the ancient world of Homer and revives the lore of *Helen, Paris and Oenone*. His importance in modern poetic drama lies in introducing the old classicism in modern plays particularly in its theme.

Binyon's most ambitious poetic play is *Ayuli* (1924). It is a three-Act play, representing the love of an Eastern king for a beautiful lady, Ayuli, for whose sake he sacrifices his kingdom. The king is the adorer of Ayuli's beauty. "The love of the king for Ayuli is not treated as an infatuation bringing a kingdom to ruin, but as an attempt to set up beauty as the ruling principle of life." Binyon, the classicist, was at heart a Romanticist, as can be seen from his study of *Ayuli*.

John Drinkwater (1882—1937) who shot into immortality by his great play *Abraham Lincoln* written in prose, made all possible efforts for the revival of poetic drama in the 20th century. He lamented the evil days on which poetic drama had fallen, and in his four plays, *The Storm* (1915), *The God of Quite* (1916), *X=O* (1917) and *Cophetua* (1922), he established the supremacy of Poetical plays over prose comedies. Of these plays *The Storm* and *X=O* are very popular. *The Storm* deals with country life. It presents the suspense of a wife about the fate of her husband who is lost in the storm. The play has a

certain dignity of idea and of expression, but it is meditative rather than dramatic in its structure. *X=O* or *A Night of Trojan War* is concerned with the horrors of war, and the entire play is an exposure of the evils of war. The poetic plays of Drinkwater have a place of their own in modern poetic drama. He established the form of poetic drama on a surer footing than other dramatists of our time.

The contribution of the Irish movement, also known as Celtic revival, is remarkable to the cause of Poetic Drama in our times. Its great leaders, W. B. Yeats, and S. M. Synge "deprecated the conversion of the theatre into the lecture platform and the pulpit by realistic playwrights." These dramatists sought to poetise drama both in its thought content as well as expression. Yeats made experiments in *Distance* for poetic drama and tried to establish the lyrical drama as a serious rival to the realistic drama in its heyday. He deprecated the conversion of the theatre into the lecture platform and the pulpit by realistic playwrights. He rejected the superficialities of the modern period and sought continuously to retire into a world of mystic symbols through which he might be able to have a glimpse of a reality, not subject to change and decay.

He determined to build up his own system of symbols and evolved almost a personal mythology. He made experiments in symbolism, presentation of self and anti-self, and almost developed an esoteric system which only those who were conversant with his ideas about soul, thought, image, body, could possibly understand. His main plays are—*The Countess Cathleen*, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In these plays Yeats devoted his genius to the creation of symbolic drama; with lyrical spontaneity.

In 1920 Yeats published *Four Plays of Dancers* and with them he entered a new threshold of dramatic possibility. In them he revives the use of masks and employs the technique of the Japanese. The plays are wholly unlike the conventional British plays; the playwright's eastern inspiration rushes through them like a great wind blowing out of the waste and lying all flat before it. In his plays Yeats gave a new lease of life to national myths and legends and poetised primitive human emotions. Being at heart

a poet, Yeats presented in lyrical verse the emotions of his characters, though in laying stress on emotional expression, he missed in giving to the story its flavour of romanticism. Yeats, however, succeeded in imparting lyricism and symbolism to poetic drama of the twentieth century.

Another Irish-man who made considerable contribution to modern poetic drama was J M Synge who had already achieved great fame by his *Riders to the Sea*, a prose play. Later on he produced *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Shadow of the Glen*, and in these two plays he presented the world of nature and outdoor life in the best way possible. Synge had a sure dramatic instinct and a keen insight into the motives of human nature. He had also the gift of touching the chords of our heart by his stirring words steeped in pathos. He had the gift of transmuting pathos and ugliness into poetry and beauty, and his plays are rich in presenting pathetic thoughts in poetic language. Yeats and Synge have become names as remarkable for modern 'poetic' drama, as Marlowe and Kyd for the Elizabethan stage.

T. S. Eliot.

The poet who was largely responsible for a new orientation in England towards verse drama and for its rebirth is T. S. Eliot. In a seminar at Delhi in 1963, Professor Daiches under-rated the genius of T. S. Eliot by calling him 'A great minor poet of the 20th century.' He might be a minor poet in poetry, but certainly he is a major force in the poetic drama of the 20th century. The poetical plays which have come since 1935-- *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *Family Reunion* (1939), *Cocktail Party* (1949) and *Confidential Clerk* (1953), and even the latest still unpublished, *The Elder Statesman*, show him to have moved away, from even ecclesiastical tradition to a deep ritualistic pagan faith. The success achieved by Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, shook off the prejudice of critics against verse drama. The spiritual note ringing throughout this play and the poetic choruses and their mystical words, have won for the play a name in the world of poetic drama. In this poetic play we have dramatic intensity combined with poetic inspiration, and the work has been acclaimed as a great success on the stage. "In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot admirably fulfilled his own

demands for poetic drama. The chief of these was that the poetry should be a subtle regulator of mood, and here Eliot succeeds fully. The poetry is the life blood of the play: the ideas, which are, in the main abstract, are given dramatic life purely by Eliot's concrete and vivid images. It is the highest tribute to a poetic drama to say, as one can of *Murder in the Cathedral*, that is both intensely dramatic and inconceivable in prose"\*

Some shortcomings of the play should be frankly admitted. St Thomas A. Becket strikes us lacking in depth. He appears more a symbol than a person. The other characters in the play do not seem to have an independent significance. They seem to be personifications "of various simple abstract attitudes meaningful only in relation to St. Thomas himself." The real 'action' of the play does not lie in the violent killing of St. Thomas, as it should have lain, but rather in his confrontation with and his victory over the various temptations, of which the most serious and dangerous is undoubtedly the temptation to accept his martyrdom. "The drama, in so far as there is a drama, is thus strictly "interior" and the outward value of the play is rather that of spectacle and a commemorative ritual."\*\*

The eminent success achieved by Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* led him to write another poetic drama *The Family Reunion*, which though keeping something of the murder element is much different from the religious theme of the murder in the Cathedral. Eliot regarded it "as a drama of contemporary people speaking contemporary language." It deals with the problem of sin and its expiation. The setting is one of English aristocratic country-house, and the scenes are the familiar drawrooms of naturalism. The persons of the play include several "every day insignificant" characters such as Ibsen used to have in his plays. The theme or the plot takes its cue from the Furies who pursued Orestes and never let him have the rest till he had committed the crime. This theme of the Furies pursuing Orestes has been transferred to an upper class country house called Wishwood in the wind-and-rain swept countryside of the north of England. The

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\* Bamber Casciogne : Twentieth Century Drama.

\*\* Frazer : The Modern Writer and his World.

theme of the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus works ill in its English setting, and fails to satisfy the readers. "*The Family Reunion*" says A. C. Ward, "is an example of material pressed into an alien mould, and showing-up of the fallacy that poetic drama could be forced into existence."

The third play *The Cocktail Party* was produced ten years after *The Family Reunion*. It is a simpler play. Here is a play having minimum of imagery and evocation. There is no symbolism in the play. The language in this homely play is homely. The verse is of the surface, although not superficial. Statements made by characters are conscious, lucid statements without any vagueness. The play could have been written in prose, but verse form has been maintained because it imposes its control at a level which is often below conscious observation. If we try to alter almost any line in the play, the charm of the play is affected.

*The Cocktail Party* has been described a 'comedy', but in fact it is only in an ironical sense that it can be taken as a comedy. "It is the most depressing play, concerned as it is with the breakdown of a sick society and an individual's inability to seek a way out of the super-civilized maze without calling on the assistance of the nearest psychiatrist." The play opens with a Cocktail party which is a failure from the beginning. Edward and his wife Lavinia are at cross purposes and are not happy. However they are brought to a state of reconciliation by Dr. Henry Harcourt Reilly, who points out to the estranged pair that conjugal happiness depends on adjustments rather than on adamant views. They agree, and ultimately lead a good life. They begin to understand each other and are happy. But the doctor is not able to bring round Miss Celia Coplestone who also suffers from loneliness. She had been the mistress of Edward once, but now she feels alienated. The doctor advises her to marry some one and lead a happy life. Loneliness for a woman is suicidal. Celia does not listen to the doctor's advice. She remains all lonely brooding over her discomfitures. Edward and Lavinia give Cocktail parties, but poor Celia is left with no zest to join them. She reaches the end of her terrible destiny, which was none other than crucifixion. Joining a religious order she

is sent to a far off land where there is a native rebellion. She is crucified. Her body is eaten by ants. Such is the martyrdom of Celia Copleston. It is a depressing and grim play.

The play is based on the idea of atonement and is in the tradition of certain Catholic conceptions, but it cannot be accepted on aesthetic grounds in the play. *The Cocktail Party* accentuates the inhumanity of despair and makes a tragic reading. It is not a real comedy, but a tragic play.

The next play *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) is again a pessimistic and depressing play. "One has the feeling that Eliot has attempted to make his characters of flesh and blood, and yet has failed to make us identify ourselves with these characters who remain strangely aloof. The last traces of poetry disappear and Eliot has carried "the machine he set in motion," with *The Family Reunion*, when he wished to bring poetry to terms with a contemporary theme—to its logical conclusion."

The play does not have an imposing theme. It does not deal with matters relating to life and death, but merely with our choice of what we want to do in the world. Sir Claude Mulhammer wanted to be a potter. He became a first rate power in the city. Colby is his son. He appoints him as his 'confidential clerk', but the young boy is not satisfied with the job of being a clerk. He decides in favour of being a church organist. His choice is for the job of a musician. He makes a safe choice for his happiness. He is not like Celia of *Cocktail Party* who prefers crucifixion to a happy life. The dramatist applauds Colby for his realistic, though unadventurous decision to be an organist, a second rate musician. The play illustrates the truth of the remark, "If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms upon life, you must accept the terms it offers you."

*The Elder Statesman* (1958) directs our attention to an elder Statesman in his retired life. He had been a distinguished statesman in active life. He had been honoured and applauded in his role as a statesman. The elder statesman is now on his death bed. He "sees for the first time the reflection of his true self, of a life spent avoiding reality and the sense of guilt which comes from moral cowardice." This play is simpler in conception and more human in treatment.

T. S. Eliot is a name to conjure with in modern drama. He has dealt with religious, secular, and psychological themes in his plays in a poetic style, varying his verse according to the theme of plays. "Eliot cannot be said to have solved all the problems which arose from the decay of romantic drama and from the limitation of the naturalist drama which he replaced. But he has perhaps brought us to a point at which such a solution can be envisaged. It is a very considerable achievement, whatever the immediate future of the drama may be; and in its nature it is beyond the mode of praise."

Somewhat in the same mood that impelled T. S. Eliot to write *The Family Reunion* and other plays, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood have collaborated to write plays. Their joint plays are *The Dog Beneath the Skin* or *Where Is Francis?* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1936) and *On the Frontier* (1938). The first play *The Dog Beneath the Skin* has a mythical theme and reads like an old story in modern context. In *Ascent of F. 6* there is a mythical atmosphere, and it is here that one notes the conscious creation of a myth out of contemporary elements. These dramatists have raised social issues to a mythological plane.

"These plays betray no neo-classical earmark beyond the choruses; but exhale a neo-romantic perfume of the strange and the remote. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* is particularly rich in symbolic imagery, characterization, stage direction, scene, and quotation. Photographically realistic incidents are blended with improbabilities into a total design." There is social propaganda in them with a left wing bias. These three plays reflect the disillusionment and despair of man in the face of the stark realities of life. The technique in these plays is borrowed from the German expressionists. They are blunt in their satire and have lost their appeal. Of the plays, *The Ascent of F.6* is the most acceptable because of its appealing theme. It presents the British expedition sent by the Government to hoist the imperial banner over a mountain marked F. 6.

Stephen Spender is the most renowned communistic playwright of modern poetical plays. He is a leftist, and in his



poetic play *The Trial of a Judge* (written for Rupert Doone's Group Theatre 1938), he is definitely a 'popular front Communist.' The theme is a powerful representation of the fate of Liberals and Communists in the hands of Hitler's Nazism. He represents the frustrating condition which produced Nazism in Germany.

Sean O' Casey introduced poignant expressionism in his plays. His early plays: *Show of Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock* and *Plough and the Stars* have themes thrilling enough to be poetic. Their theme is the "common slum-dweller's heroism in the face of the daily hardships of existence."

. During the period of the Second World War there was a remarkable progress in poetic drama. Immediately after the war a Poet's Theatre was established in London. Norman Nicholson's *The Old man of the Mountain* had a successful run and was appreciated for its Biblical setting and nice representation of the story of Elijah and Ahab.

Christopher Fry was the only modern metaphysical verse dramatist who introduced the theme of philosophy in his plays. He has shown that modern verse drama need not be confined to the presentation of tragic and religious themes. In Fry's *Lady's not for Burning* (1949) poetic drama achieves another milestone. The play deals with the life of a young girl who is condemned to be burned at the stake for she is convicted of witchcraft. The period of the play is the fifteenth century when there was a general belief in witches and their malevolent influence on human life. A young man offers himself for the lady and says that the lady's not for burning. The girl does not accept the young man's sacrifice and persuades him to live rather than immolate himself for her sake. The appearance of the rag-man whom the girl was supposed to have turned into a dog saves the situation. The lady is pardoned and the tragedy is averted. The verse is loose, but sudden flights of poetry sown in the midst of pedestrian passages. Fry advocated verse as an appropriate medium of philosophy because it directly makes an appeal to our intuition. "Fry's plays are not so much an achievement

\* Bamber Gascoigne : *Twentieth Century Drama*.

in poetic drama, as an original application of verse to familiar theatrical ends. Mr. Fry's work, that is to say, is not really a part of the revived tradition of poetic drama. It is to be related, not so much to the poetic drama of Yeats and Eliot, as to particular tradition of Comedy in which in our own country, the most successful practitioners have been writers in prose."\* Fry's verse plays are creations of mood and have a wonderful resplendence of language. What strikes one first in the plays of Fry is his completely idiosyncratic style and his felicity for words. His language has a dazzle which seems to be almost an end in itself and is nearly blinding when striving to ignore it, an attempt is made to understand the essential Fry."\*\*

Fry's work has been adjudged differently by different critics. A. C. Ward is of the opinion that "Christopher Fry brought light and air as well as music and warmth into the frigid charnel-house of contemporary verse drama."† Quite opposite to Ward's view is Raymond Williams's opinion who says, "There is a definite place in modern English drama for Mr. Fry's comedies, but, in the resonance of his success, it is important to emphasise that this place is neither innovating nor directive."‡ The truth seems to be with Raymond Williams and we whole heartedly endorse his judgment.

In modern poetical plays, myths, religion, politics, modern life, have been well represented. Radio programmes are giving further impetus to poetical plays. The future of poetical plays is bright. If we survey the history of the last half Century of English verse drama, we cannot say that a rich poetic harvest has been garnered every year. In no period did art grow in geometrical progression. Its growth is slow and steady and the past achievement in this direction should fill us with faith and hope for the future, for it is faith that creates and hope that sustains.

No doubt, the main current of the theatre will flow in what Galsworthy has termed, "the broad and clear-cut channel

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\* Raymond Williams : Drama from Ibsen to Eliot.

\*\* Fredrick Lumley : Trends in 20th Century Drama.

† A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

‡ Raymond Williams : Drama From Ibsen to Eliot.

of naturalism." "But there will always remain a twisting and delicious stream which will bear on its breast new barks of poetry, shaped, it may be, like prose, but a prose incarnating through its fantasy, and symbolism all the deeper aspirations, yearnings, doubts and mysterious strivings of the human spirit."\* "We may foresee, then, not only the continuance of a drama in verse, but also the growth of a poetic drama in prose—a prose either subtly suggestive, like that of Maeterlinck, or else beautiful picturesque and expressive like that of Synge and the lesser Irish dramatists."\*\*

**Q. 123. Write a note on Expressionism in modern drama and evaluate the work of the dramatists belonging to the 'Expressionistic School.'**

**Ans.** Disgusted with the overtone of realism in drama, and the expression of the external life of sordid realities, certain dramatists in America, Europe and England made new experiments in producing plays not dealing with external realism but with the inner life of the characters. Expressionism in drama is just an experiment in presenting the inner life of the characters in a psychological way. "In the theatre it means a subjective instead of an objective projection of the characters. In an ordinary play they reveal themselves by what they do or say. Expressionism endeavours to project the inner working of the mind."†

"Expressionist drama was concerned not with society but with man. It aimed to offer, subjective psychological analysis, not so much of an individual as of a type, and made much of the subconscious. For such a study established dramatic forms and methods of expressionists threw overboard conventional structure in favour of an unrestricted freedom. Their dialogue was often cryptic and patterned, now verse, now prose, and was in every way as far removed from the naturalistic prose of the realistic school as can well be imagined. Symbolic figures, embodiments of inner, secret impulses were introduced on the stage in the

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\* John Galsworthy : Some Platitudes about Drama.

\*\* Chandler : Aspects of Modern Drama.

† Lynton Hudson : Twentieth Century Drama.

attempt to make clear the psychological complexities of character.”\* “Expressionism was an all-out onslaught against any sense of values in Germany. It has been described as an exigency of the mind, a mixture of ecstasy and obscurity, both facets being peculiar to the German temperament, and let us admit it, language. No wonder and thank goodness, it has never been assimilated neat by others.”\*\* The prominent dramatists of the ‘Expressionistic School’ in England and America are G’Casey, Priestley, Munro, O’Neill, Rube Gstein an Elmer Rice. It should be noted that ‘expressionistic drama’ has not been very popular in England and extreme forms of expressionism were rarely practised and handled by British dramatists. We will briefly deal with the works of these dramatist of the ‘Expressionistic School.’

#### Sean O’Casey (1884 — )

O’Casey, the Irish dramatist, is a worthy successor of Synge, and is interested in the presentation of Irish life, not the Irish life of the Aran Islands, but the life of slums of Dublin bringing out all the sordidness and drunkenness of the Irish men and women. “His background, however, was not the Aran Islands but the slums of Dublin, crowded noisy tenements where women quarrelled and loafers drank, and the tragic violence of civil war was ever at hand.”†

O’Casey’s first play *The Shadow of a Gunman* brings out the slum tenements of Dublin in their crowded squalor. It reveals the bloodiness of the Anglo Irish war of 1920. This play was produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1923. The next play *Juno and the Paycock* was produced in 1924. It is a political play dealing with the execution of a youngman by his Republican comrades who suspected him of treachery. *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) also deals with the cruel and brutal folly of civil war. *The Silver Tessie* combines the naturalistic and expressionistic methods, and the skill with which the dramatist allows the one to drift into the other is really praise-worthy. “In the war scenes of *The Silver Tassie*, O’Casey tried to communicate the soldier’s

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Fredrick Lumley : Trends in Twentieth Century Drama.

† Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

reaction to the blood and sweat of war in a way that conveyed the universality of the experience. For this purpose he adopted a mixture of chanted verse and stylized prose put into the mouths of nameless choruses of soldiers, wounded stretcher-bearers.”\*

The other plays of O’Casey, *Within the Gates* (1933), *The Star Turns Red* (1940), *Purple Dust* (1940), *Red Rose for me* (1946), *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946), *Cockadoodle Dandy* (1949) do not have the same intensity as his first three plays though the magic of language still gives them their enlivening touch.

The plays of O’Casey are about Irish life and the tragedy and comedy of this life is well brought out in dialogues, which are vivid, racy and rhythmical. In O’Casey comedy and tragedy sit cheek by jowl. “Comedy is seldom long absent, yet one can never forget the grim, underlying sadness. He draws what he sees with a ruthless objectivity and an impressionistic vividness of detail.”

The characters of O’Casey are weak. They are crude and pitiable. They are ‘comic creatures speaking a rich lingo of the Dublin slums. They strut about, boasting, singing, quarrelling, drinking with an unflagging vitality.’

What kind of life is presented by O’Casey? His pictures are realistic and he tells us convincingly that in a civil war it is the poor people of the country who suffer. “Few writers have so intimately fused realism and pathos, tragedy and comedy, for his world is a basically comic one whose atmosphere is a sky laden with fate ever ready to strike almost at random and therefore it is a most pitiable world.”\*\*

C. K. Munro (1889— )

C. K. Munro tried to imitate the German expressionism in his play *Rumour* (1924). It deals with the origin of war and modern international jealousies. It is a significant play of the expressionistic school.

Reginald Berkeley. (1890—1935)

Berkeley’s play *The White Chateau* (1927) is in the style of Munro’s *Rumour*. It does not have the intensity and bitterness of *The Silver Tassie*, but it too has, power, dignity and distinction. His other plays are *The Quest of Elizabeth*, *Mango Island*, *The*

\* Lynton Hudson : The 20th Century Drama.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

*World's End.*

**H. F. Rubinstein (1891—)**

Rubinstein made experiments in the style and manner of Berkeley. His famous play *The House* (1926) deals with a building having vital entity and power. "Perhaps the greatest weakness of this play lies in the fact that a theme akin to those that informed the old problem dramas has been dealt with in a style distinctly 'modern' and that consequently there is a disharmony between the subject and its treatment. Mr. Rubinstein, however, is an interesting pioneer, and in this play (*The House*) as well as in *Isabel's Eleven* (1927) he is obviously endeavouring to express something new in dramatic form."\*

**J. B. Priestley (1894—)**

"Priestley is a playwright who has attempted to break out of the conventions of the naturalistic drama, tending sometimes towards a modified form of expressionism, at other times breaking up the illusion of the box-realism deliberately as an *Ever Since Paradise*.

He is the author of more than thirty plays. He commands a wide range. He has produced comedy, farce, domestic drama and expressionistic plays. His famous expressionistic play is *Johnson over Jordan*. It reads like a morality play. The other plays of Priestley are *Time and the Conways* (1937), *Dangerous Corner* (1932), *Music At Night* (1938), *I have Been Here Before* (1937), *Laburnum Grove* (1933), *The Long Mirror* (1940), *They Came to a City* (1943), *Desert Highway* (1943), *Home is Tomorrow* (1948).

"Priestley the ardent reformer, and Priestley the plain man both appear in his dramas. His typically Yorkshire humour is part of the almost aggressive 'bon hommie' of much of his work. His characters are soundly drawn, the dialogue is pungent, and his plays are always good theatre. His chief lack is the poetic insight, which alone can make the greatest drama out of the metaphysical problems that engaged his mind in his experimental work."

**Elmer Rice (1892—)**

This American dramatist produced *Adding Machine* in 1923.

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\* A. Nicoll : British Drama.

It is considered a fine play of the expressionistic school and is a nice 'experiment in expressionism.'

**Eugene O'Neill (1888—1953)**

O'Neill is a famous American dramatist of international fame. He began as a Realist in *Anna Christie* (1922) dealing with the redemption of a prostitute, but soon came out of the realistic fold. Since then he has made experiments in new techniques of presentation, new dramatic forms and original dialogue. He has a spark of genius and his experiments in style, and expression are sometimes too bold to be easily followed by the audience. He is a serious dramatist dealing with serious subjects like religion, philosophy and scientific thought. He is the greatest exponent of the expressionist drama in the English language. His dramas are lengthy and sometimes obscure and confusing. But "he is a dramatist of immense force and powerful imagination, and his best plays show a genuine sense of the theatre." His main plays are, *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *All God's, Chillun Got Wings* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Lazarus Laughed* (1927), *Ah ! Wilderness* (1933), *Days without End* (1934).

"O'Neill was perhaps the only really professional playwright who in his erratic trials and errors has covered the whole artistic field up to existentialism, displaying promising competence and talent.

**Q. 124 Give a brief account of the development of Drama from 1939 to 1963.**

**Ans.** "The history of drama since 1939 is largely the study of the effect on the theatre of the 1939—45 War. The immediate result of the imposition of the 'black-out' was a complete closing of London theatres for some time and gloomy forebodings about the future of the drama; but there were good things which emerged. At no time during the Second World War did theatre become so completely dominated by the frivolous gaiety of 'leave entertainment' as in the 1914—18 War. It was as though the immediacy of the struggle, in the bombings and blitzes, prevented the worst excesses of the 'leave spirit'. Light entertainment there

was in plenty, in review and comedy, but its popularity never completely submerged the interest in more serious drama. Moreover, a great step forward was made in the taking of good drama into the provinces, into the smallest villages, and wherever army camps and hostels for workers brought the companies sponsored C. E. M. A. (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts). E. N. S. A. (Entertainments National Service Association). The touring companies of these two organizations brought live theatre to untold thousands who had never before encountered it. In so doing, they created a vast new public on which the post-war dramatist has been able to rely; a public was responsible for the boom which immediately followed the war.

"Our period owes much to the work of four organizations, which have not only done much pioneer work among new audiences, but have contributed materially to the standard of dramatic production at all levels. In addition to C. E. M. A. (which was later to become The Arts Council of Great Britain), and E. N. S. A., The British Drama League (founded 1919) went on from strength to strength during the War and post-War years and of the value of a thriving dramatic tradition to the health and well-being of the professional theatre can be no question—while on the professional stage the War saw an enormous advance in the prestige of the Old Vic Theatre Company, with its training school and children's theatre company, the Young Vic. Nor must we omit the high place in public esteem which has been gained by the annual Shakespeare Festivals at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon."

To the work of C. E. M. A and the Old Vic is largely due the marked rise in the artistic standards of play production which has been a feature of post-War drama. The general level of acting in major professional productions is very high, while, in subtlety and aesthetic taste, staging and the general techniques of production have improved enormously. Great and gifted actors have been numerous, the names of Sir John Gielgud, Sir Lawrence Olivier, Sir Ralph Richardson, Dame Edith Evans, and Dame Sybil Thorndike leap at once to mind.

"It is, indeed, as an age of great actors and memorable productions, of the classics (and particularly of Shakespeare) that



this decade will be remembered. New dramatists of stature to compare with Shaw, Synge, or even Galsworthy, have not as yet been forthcoming. Sean O'Casey has continued to write, but though he had some success with *Red Roses for Me* (1946) it is doubtful whether such plays as *The Star Turns Red* (1940), *Purple Dust* (1945), and *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1947) have added much to his reputation. The prolific J. B. Priestley still draws his audiences, and James Bridie went on writing till his death in 1951 with unfailing versatility and inventiveness."

"Among the new names none is as yet numbered among the great. Four stand out among the younger generation: Peter Ustinov (1921—), author of *The House of Regrets* (1940), *Blow Your Own Trumpet* (1941), *The Banbury Nose* (1944), *The Man behind the Statue* (1945), *The Indifferent Shepherd* (1948), *The Man in the Raincoat* (1949), and *The Love of Four Colonels* (1951); Terence Rattigan (1911—), who has had great success with *French without Tears* (1936), *Flare Path* (1942), *While the Sun Shines* (1944), *Love in Idleness* (1944), *The Winslow Boy* (1946), *The Browning Version* (1948), and *Adventure Story* (1949); Denis Johnston (1901—) who followed the notable *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1931) with *Weep for The Cyclops* (1946); and Emlyn Williams (1905—), actor, and author of a number of successful plays, among them the earlier *The Corn is Green* (1938), and more recently, *The Wind of Heaven* (1945) and *Tresspass* (1947)."

"Yet none of these four seems to wish to create a new tradition, to give the drama the new sense of direction and purpose which it now needs, for the realist tradition of problem and discussion has gradually exhausted itself. At the moment experiments in a new direction are almost exclusively in the poetic drama, for the re-establishment of which T. S. Eliot did so much in the thirties. Since 1939 he has produced *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), and *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and though they have not been as successful as *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Cocktail Party*, originally staged at the Edinburgh Festival, made a great stir. A rising dramatist, master of vivid and telling verse drama, and one of the brightest stars in the universe of contemporary drama is Christopher Fry (1907—) whose work illustrates the new vitality of the poetic medium. His

plays include *The Boy with a Cart* (1939), *A Phoenix too Frequent* (1946), *The Firstborn* (1946), *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1949) *Thor With Angels* (1949), *Venus Observed* (1950) and *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951). Other dramatists in the poetic tradition include Ronald Duncan (1914), author of the very successful *This Way to the Tomb !* (1945); Norman Nicholson (1914—), who wrote *The Old Man of the Mountains* (1946), and Peter Yates, (1914—), author of *The Assassin* (1946), and *The Burning Mask* (1948) ”

“Although the theatrical boom of the middle forties has undoubtedly passed with the growth of financial stringency, the impression of the post-1939 stage will remain as one of a vitality which should ultimately convert the present lack of direction into a new and living dramatic tradition.”\*

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## 20th Century Poetry

(1880—1966)

**Q. 125.** Write an essay on the main tendencies in modern English Poetry.

**Ans.** “When the twentieth century opened” writes A. C. Ward, “Tennyson had been dead nine years, and there was a wide spread impression that English poetry had died with him.” To the critics of the early 20th century it seemed that the glorious days of the English poetic muse were over and what was to follow was going to be puerile, wayward, and obscure. A. C. Ward came out with the remark, “The poetry of the period shows a distinct decline, not in the general level of execution but in genius and breadth of range.” The apprehensions of the critics of modern poetry were rather misplaced, and modern poetry has to give a rich harvest of poetic thought in a style and diction peculiar to the age. The fact is that in the modern age there “has been no dearth of great poets or great poems that will stand the test of time and become a part of the imperishable literary heritage of England.”

### **Astounding Variety of Themes in Modern Poetry.**

Poetry to-day can be written on almost any subject. The modern poet finds inspiration from railway trains, tramcars, telephone, the snake charmer and things of commonplace interest. Modern poets have not accepted the theory of great subjects for poetic composition. The whole universe is the modern poet's experience. He writes on themes of real life and also makes excursion in the world of religion, mysticism and fairyland. We have a wide variety of poems such as *The Song of Train* by John Davidson, *Goods Train at Night* by Kenneth Ashley; as *The Charcoal Burner* by Edmund Gosse, *Machine Guns* by Richard Aldington, *Seekers* by Masfield and *Listeners* by Walter De la Mare.

In their moods also, modern poets are varied and do not belong to a single recognizable group. “Mr. Bridges is the poet of

nine o'clock in the morning, Mr. Hardy of midnight. The truth is there has never been a greater variety of moods among poets than during the past two generations."\*

#### **Humanitarian and Democratic Note in Modern Poetry.**

Modern poetry is marked with a note of humanitarianism and democratic feeling. The modern poet, more than Wordsworth, is interested in the life of labourers, toilers and workers in the field. He perceives in the daily struggles of these people the same potentialities of a spiritual conflict that the older poets found in those of exalted rank.

Masefield, Gibson, Galsworthy are mainly interested in the common man and his sufferings. In their poetry there is a note of sympathy for their miserable lot. Their grim annals and dark horrors find an expression in their poetry. 'Consecration' by Masefield is a representative poem bringing out the modern poet's concern with the life of the common people. The poet says—

*Others may sing of the wealth and the mirth,  
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth,  
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of  
the earth.*

The modern poet is interested not only in the lives of the poor people, but is equally inspired to treat sympathetically the lot of the animals. Galsworthy's *Stupidity Street* pleads for greater sympathy for birds. In *The Bells of Heaven*, Hodgson invokes sympathy for 'tamed, and shabby tigers and dancing dogs and bears.' *The Bull* is another poem of sympathy for the afflicted animals.

#### **Realism in Modern Poetry.**

The poetry of the 20th Century is marked with a note of realism. Realism in modern poetry was the product of a reaction against the pseudo-romanticism of the last century over and above the influence of Science. The modern poet sees life and paints it as it is with all its warts and ugliness. He tears the veil which the romanticists had hung between life and art.

Robert Frost, Edmund Blunden, W. W. Gibson, John Masefield are the poets of realism in modern poetry. Robert

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\* Robert Lynd : Introduction to an Anthology of Modern English Poetry.

Frost in the *Gum Gatherer*, Edmund Blunden in *The Poor Man's Pig*, W. W. Gibson in *The Stone* and John Masefield in *Cargoes*, Rupert Brooke in *The Great Lover* strike the note of realism. The best expression of realism in modern poetry is to be found among the war poets, Owen Graves, Sasson, who have described vividly and realistically the horrors of war in a language that sometimes shocks poetic sensibility. Sasson in the poem *Counter Attack* "set out to present in brutal verse the realities of war without gloss or evasion."

#### **Romantic Element in Modern Poetry.**

In spite of the preponderance of realism in modern poetry, the spirit of romance continues to sway the minds of certain poets like Walter De La Mare, James Elroy Flecker, W. B. Yeats, John Masefield, Edward Thomas. The works of these poets prove the fact that the spirit of romance is as old as life itself. Walter De La Mare's poetry is saturated with the true romantic spirit bordering on supernaturalism. With him the ghosts and fairies of the old world have come into their own in the 20th century. Flecker in his poetic drama *Hassan* and in poems like *The Old Ships* has caught the oriental atmosphere in his poetry. The dim moonlight of romance and chivalry hovers over the early poems of Gibson. In these poems the voice of the true romanticist is heard in lines like these—

*I sang of Lovers and she praised my song,  
The while the King looked on her with cold eyes.*

#### **Pessimistic Note in Modern Poetry.**

There is a note of pessimism and disillusionment in modern poetry. The modern poet has realised the pettiness of human life, and the tragedy and suffering of the downtrodden people have made him gloomy and leaden eyed. Poetry, as the expression of this feeling, has become autumnal in tone. Housman, Hardy, Huxley, T. S. Eliot are the poets of pessimism and disillusionment in modern poetry. They are dissatisfied with God and the naked dance of chance and materialism in the modern world, and their poetry is an arraignment of modern society in a pessimistic strain. T. S. Eliot's lines in *The Waste Land* are marked with a note of pessimism—

*What are the roots that clutch,  
 What branches grow  
 Out of this stony rubbish ? Son of man,  
 You cannot say, or Guess, for you know only,  
 A heat of broken images, where the sun beats  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief*

#### **Religion and Mysticism in Modern Poetry.**

The modern age is the age of science, but even in this scientific age we have poems written on the subject of religion and mysticism. Francis Thompson, Robert Graves, G. K. Chesterton, Belloc, Chrilotte Mew, W. B. Yeats, George Russel, are the great poets who have kept alive the flame of religion and mysticism in their poetry. Thompson's *Hounds of Heaven* and *In Strange Land* are great poems of religion in modern poetry. Rubert Graves *In The Wilderness*. Mrs. Meynell in *I Am the Way* present the omnipotence and omniscience of God. Chesterton in the *Ballad of White Horse*, *The House of Christmas* evokes the feelings of religion. Noyes was a Christian by faith, and in joyous verse he sang, *The Lord of Life is risen again and Love is Lord of all*.

#### **Love in Modern Poetry.**

Love forms the subject of many modern lyrics. Robert Bridges has produced fine sonnets of love in *The Growth of Love*. His poems *Awake My Heart to be Loved : Awake, Awake*, and *I will not let thee go* are fine lyrics of love. W. B. Yeats's *When You are old* is a fine poem of love. Arthur Symon's *The Broken Tryst* deals with disappointment in love. The lover feels despair because the 'tryst' is broken.

*And then a woman passed. The hour.  
 Rang heavily along the air  
 I have no hope, I had no power  
 To think—for thought was but despair.*

John Masefield finds a feeling of dejection in love. The beauty of the beloved reminds him at once of the decay of physical charms. His mind never seems to forget that :—

*Death has a lodge in lips as red as cherry  
 Death has a mansion in the yew tree berries.*

**Nature in Modern Poetry.**

Nature captivates the modern poet no less than the poets of the earlier ages. But the modern poet of nature is not a mystic. He does not find any spiritual meaning in Nature. He is elated and exalted at the sight of nature's loveliness. He gives an exquisite picture of birds, clouds, landscapes, sea and the countryside in his poetry. Masfield, Robert Bridges, Edmund Blunden are the great poets of Nature in modern poetry.

**Complexity and Psychology in Modern Poetry.**

Some modern poets are interested in delving deep into the recesses of the subconscious mind. Some of the poems of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are difficult to follow because of their psychological complexity and difficult imagery. "We feel that much modern poetry is very difficult and that it does not always repay the labour involved in working it out. In the last hundred years complexity has been more and more heavily borne in all of us, and a false or affected simplicity is a detestable thing."\* This complexity in modern poetry has been accentuated by the New Metaphysicals like T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis Mac-Neice. These new metaphysicals "were often as crabbed and tortuous in expression as the least luminous of their long ago predecessors such as Donne."†

**Longingness in Modern Poetry.**

Longingness is at the root of all poetry whether ancient or modern. Modern poets express longingness of all kinds in their poetry. W. B. Yeats's *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is the yearning of a homesick heart translated into the music of his dreams. Rupert Brooke's *Old Vicarage, Granchester* is not merely a wail, it is a cry of homesickness. John Masfield's *Seekers* is the best example of the longing of man for God and the eternal city of light.

*Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth nor blessed  
abode*

*But the hope of the city of God at the other end of the road.  
Not for us are content and quiet, and peace of mind*

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\* G. S. Fraser : The Modern Writer and His World.

† A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

*For we go seeking a city that we shall never find.*

#### **Diction and Style of Modern Poetry.**

Modern poets have a preference for simple and direct expression. Old archaic words and usages are no longer in vogue. What guides the modern poet in his selection of words is expressiveness. Words are chosen for their association and only those words are employed which convey the meaning.

Modern poets have chosen to be free in the use of metre. They have followed *Vers Libre* i. e. freedom from trammels of verse. They have made experiments in versification. Verse rhythm is replaced by sense rhythm. There is free verse movement in modern poetry.

#### **Conclusion**

The poets of to-day are sincere in their vocation. There is the stamp of honesty in modern poetry. "The poetry of the 20th century is less vague, less verbose, less eloquent than most poetry of the Victorian period. It has set before itself an ideal of absolute simplicity and sincerity—an ideal which implies an individual and unsteretyped diction and an individual and unsteretyped rhythms."\*

Poetry is a criticism of life. It must maintain its contact with life. Modern poetry is the reflection of modern life. It is realistic in tone and expresses the spirit of the age. It cannot be denounced as petty, wayard and puerile. It can safely take its place of pride in the kingdom of poetry produced from the times of Chaucer to the modern times.

**Q. 126.** Give a brief account of English poetry of the Nineties (1880—1914) and the poets belonging to this period of poetry.

**Ans.** The Decadents.

During the nineties of the last century an effort was made to keep alive the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, Swinburne Morris and Rossetti, and the poets of this age sought to imitate the overcloying sweetness and luxuriousness of their predecessors. The poets of the nineties, for their passion to keep alive the claims of

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\* Harriet Munro : The New Poetry.



art and luxuriousness alive in an age of growing realism have been denounced as *Decadents*. They sought to escape from the world of machinery, industry and banal morality to the world of art. They followed the gospel of Art for Art's sake. Three poets belong to the group of the Decadents. They are Ernest Dowson [1867—1900] Lionel Johnson [1867—1902], Arthur Symonds [1815—1945]. The group of these poets "had little to say that was worthwhile, and concentrated on ornamenting the triviality of their subject with a carefully sought, otherworldly beauty of sound."\*

Ernest Dowson 'wrote many decorative pieces, shallow in thought, but dangerously attractive with a finical perfection.' He is the most purely lyrical of the group. Lionel Johnson was a scholar and was immersed in the kingdom of books. He was lost to the realities of life. He wrote lines echoing his scholarly taste :

*Dear heavenly books !  
With kindly voices, winning looks,  
Enchant me with your spells of art  
And draw me homeward to your heart*

Stephen Phillips, the author of many poetic dramas, attracted attention by poem like *Christ in Hades* (1896), *Poems* (1897) and a few lyrics remarkable for their metrical ingenuities. Oscar Wilde produced a few decadent verse marked with a lyrical flow and the reader is particularly impressed by his *The Ballad of Reading Goal*. He wrote a good deal of persiflage. Arthur Symonds was unfortunate in being dragged in the school of the decadents for he had poetic insight and could have written better verse. But the few poems that he has left behind are truly decadent in tone. They express his shallow thoughts and sweet sins in a luscious language. John Addington Symonds imitated the verse of these decadent poets and translated poems of medieval scholars in an ornate style marked with floridity and diffusiveness.

#### The Realists.

The period between (1880—1900) was the age of realism and impressionism in Europe as well as in England. Three poets of this period are realistic. Wilfred Blunt (1840—1922), William

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

Ernest Henley (1849—1903), Rudyard Kipling (1865—1936), kept alive the claims of realism at a time when the Decadents were attempting to surcharge poetic thoughts with emotionalism and luscious passion. W. Blunt presented the ugliness of modern industrial civilization in his poetry, but he had no appreciation for the sordidness that he brought out in his verses. He expressed his disgust at the ugliness and drabness of industrial life. Unfortunately he could not transform the ugliness of modern life into poetic material, and beauty and loveliness. E. Henley was a great admirer of Blunt and was a pioneer of the new realism in English poetry. He is well known by the collection of poems published in the volume named *In Hospital*. The poems of Henley are symbolical in character. They are symbol both of the sickness of the modern world and its preoccupation with science. Henley is the first poet of the new age who used ugliness, meanness and pain as the subjects of poetry. "Henley's hospital poems are perhaps, the first in which an English poet finds completely satisfactory images in the kind of ugliness peculiar to the modern world." Here is an example of Henley's ugly realism—

*As with varnish red and glistening  
Dripped his hair, his feet looked rigid;  
Raised, he settled stiffly side ways  
You could see his hurts were spinal.*

&

*My head is bloody but undowed*

Rudyard Kipling (1865—1936).

Kipling was the great imperialist poet of the present age and his poems are to be found in *Departmental Ditties* (1886) and *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), *The Seven Seas* (1896), *The Five Nations* (1903), *Inclusive Verse* and *Poems* (1930).

Kipling was essentially the poet of the soldiers and sailors, and many of his poems are written on the exploits of these British tommies in a language spoken by them. "By making the uneducated British fighting man articulate Kipling brought a new element into English poetry." Though Kipling was himself a cultured Anglo Indian, but to give the air of verisimilitude to his verse, he introduced the 'Cockney dialect' in poetry which was virtually a

foreign tongue to him. "In his use of this dialect, therefore, he was performing a literary trick, rather than employing a natural medium of expression: the self-conscious man of letters can be detected behind the tatter of illiterate sounds."\*

Another significant note in Kipling's poetry is that of imperialism. He is the poet of England and the Laureate of the Empire. He made the English conscious of their great heritage and roused feelings of superiority over the backward and undeveloped races. Imperialism found a clear and unabashed voice in him. He exulted in the achievements of his countrymen in founding the Empire and did not care to emphasise the harsh and cruel means adopted to increase its bounds. Charles Williams says, "He talked of England in a way that destroyed all England's greatness."

"His poetry has little metaphysical interest. What served as a philosophy of life in most of Kipling's poetry was the conviction that Englishmen were divinely charged with the duty of enlightening the world's—

*Fluttered folk and wild—*

*Your new-caught, sullen-people's*

*Half-devil and half-child.*

His attitude was partly domineering and partly that of a benevolent despot. He preached that the cleaners were not to expect gratitude for their pains—

*Take up the white man's burden*

*And reap his old reward.*

Kipling's poetry is marked with a note of vigour and masculinity. He was a realist and asserted the claims of virility and actuality. His poems sing the song of ordinary healthy manhood. The love of masculine life is his keynote. He preferred a courageous and dangerous way of living to silly romanticism.

Kipling is equally interested in Indian life, and his two poems *Shiva and Grasshopper* and *A Song of Kabir* show his full understanding of the spirit of Hindu tradition. He has composed poems on Indian people such as *Ganou* and Indian political and religious thought.

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

Kipling wrote a number of poems dealing with Nature and country life. *Suxsses* and the *Flowers* deserve attention. But his nature poetry is not impressive. "He is not capable of noticing the delicate hues and tones of Nature. He paints anything that strikes his eye with a few rapid strokes."

"As a craftsman in verse his equipment was that of a master-in-embryo. He did not always use his technical gift to advantage and when the weeding-out process is undertaken there will be much doggerel to remove. But over his ready tendency to drop into jog-trot verse must be set the almost Miltonic impressiveness with which he marshalled the pageantry of names-names of people and places, of ships, flowers and herbs."\* In some poems there is often craftsmanship but he lacked "that intensity of vision which vitalizes the idea and spirit of great poetry."\*\*

To the sensitive mind Kipling often appears a little noisy and vulgar. His sense of racial superiority and aggressive imperialism appears nauseating. His didacticism smacks of superciliousness. He has been intolerable in refined circles. "These were antagonised by what they considered to be his militant imperialism, his hotch-potch of brutality and sentimentality, his banjo rhythms, and his addiction to a pseudo-cockney style of utterance which represented his notion of English soldier's speech."† "As a poet Kipling claims credit for reintroducing realism and racy vigour into the verse of the nineties. At his best he achieves genuine poetry; at his worst he can be mechanically and stridently crude. He lacks delicacy of touch. He is a ceaseless experimenter in verse forms and rhythms, and his main themes are those of his prose works."‡

### 3. The Pessimists.

The two great pessimistic poets of the nineties are Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman. They kept alive the spirit of questioning about sense and outward things and gave a jolt to the feelings of self complacency and cheap optimism of the Victorians. Their poetry is the final expression of the disillusionment which had

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

\*\* A. C. Word—Twentieth Century Literature.

† Ibid.

‡ E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

been at work ever since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Thomas Hardy (1840—1928).**

The fame of Hardy as a poet rests on *Wessex Poems* (written between 1865 and 1870), *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901), *The Dynasts* (Part I 1903, II 1906, III 1908), *Time's Laughing-Stocks* (1909), *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), *Moment of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* (1917), *Later Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), *Human Shows* (1925). *Winter Words* (1928), *Collected Poems* (1932). "If we accept *The Dynasts*, his epic drama of the Napoleonic wars, cast in a gigantic mould, the bulk of Hardy's verse consists of short lyrics pithily condensed in expression, often intentionally angular in rhythm but always showing great technical care and a love of experimentation" *The Dynasts* is Hardy's monumental work. It is the biggest and most sustained work in English Literature since the Victorian age. It deals of the War with Napoleon from 1805 to 1815 and consists of nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes. It reveals the working of Destiny, 'presiding over all, cruel in its blindness' in its grimmest aspect, and is, in the words of Lascelles Abercrombie, "the biggest, the most consistent and deliberate exhibition of fatalism in literature." In the words of Harold Williams, "The Dynasts, in the grand simplicity of its imaginative scene, wherein the land, cities, peoples and armies of Europe are revealed as in a single spectacle, moving, breathing, writhing in meaningless and self-immolating tragedy, is the most impressive achievement in English Literature for two or three generations."\* Its appeal is to the intellect rather than to the eye. It may not have great poetry except at places, but it shows Hardy's extraordinary architectural skill and may be called the final culmination of his philosophy. "It is not a story out of which a philosophy emerges, but rather a philosophy unfolded through the tragic events of this story."\*\* In this work Hardy has employed a language, 'full of images which crowd fast upon another with cumulative suggestive strength.'

In popular opinion Hardy is a novelist par excellence and his real work is to be found in his novels. But Hardy himself did not have this opinion about his genius. He liked to be known as

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\* Harold Williams : Modern English Writers.

\*\* Scott-James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

a poet rather than a novelist. "To be a poet, to give his life to poetry that had always been his desire, and if he had been quite free to choose it is likely that he would have written no novels at all."† Lionel Johnson, writing in 1896, felt constrained to compare Hardy, not with another novelist, but not with a great poet—Wordsworth. The fact is that the soul of Hardy was animated by poetic feelings and even in his prose works the poetic feeling gushes out with an emotional force. "Poetic feeling and power are evinced in all the more moving passages in the novels; Marty South's lament in *The Woodlanders*, though written as prose, may stand as one of the superb the most moving lyrics of the English language."

#### Hardy's Melancholy and Belief in Destiny.

The melancholy, which is a characteristic feature of Hardy's fiction, continues to pervade his poetry. "Funny man, Browning," Hardy is reported to have said once, "all that optimism ! He must have put it in to please the public. He can't have believed it." Hardy was temperamentally incapable of seeing any justification for optimism. His poems reveal the miseries and sufferings of human life. He presents the cruel working of destiny in human life spoiling the chances of man's happiness. Destiny strews joy and pain with a nerveless and purposeless hand :

*These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown  
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.*

In one form or another this power of destiny is presented in Hardy's poetry. His voice is raised against God, whom he calls a blackguard :

*Has some Vast Imbecility  
Mighty to build and blend,  
But impotent to tend,  
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry ?  
Or come we of an Automaton  
Unconscious of our pains.*

He protests against the Immanent Will, weaving the cruel web of life.

*Like a knitter drowsed,*

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† Scott-James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

*Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,  
The will has woven with an absent heed,  
Since life first was ; and ever will so weave.*

#### **Hardy as a Poet of Love.**

Hardy's love-poems are the most intense and impassioned part of his work. He deals with problems arising out of unhappy marriages, and children born out of unhappy wedlock. *The Flirts' Tragedy, A Sunday Morning Tragedy, The Home Coming* are some of his significant love poems ending in tragedy. His love-poems, even though the majority of them are poems of frustration, hold us under the spell of reality like a tragedy in a neighbour's house. "To have lived even for an hour is with Browning to live for ever after in the inheritance of a mighty achievement. To have lived for an hour is in, Mr. Hardy's Imagination, to have deepened the sadness even more than the beauty of one's memories."

#### **Hardy's Lyrics.**

Hardy has left behind a number of lyrics, but they lack the rapture and abandon, music and emotionalism of fine lyrics like those of Herrick and Shelley. Hardy's lyrics are stiff and resemble the work of the philosophical lyrists of the seventeenth century. His lyrics lack flexibility and spontaneity. "In the later lyrical poems there is a greater weight of experience, and emotion arising from experience, a deeper undercurrent of thought, and a variety and richness of diction."\* His lyrics are intense and in a few words he presents an experience deep and moving. It had been the opinion among some critics that Hardy being essentially 'a spacious writer' was incapable of writing short, intense lyrics. But his two lyrics *In Time of the Breaking of Nations* containing only sixty three words and Shelley's *Skylark* falsify the accusation against Hardy's lyric genius. "The fewness of the words in no way reduces the magnitude of the achievement; rather it enhances it, by fulfilling one of the requirements of great poetry that it should hold 'an ocean of thought in a drop of language.'\*\*

#### **Hardy's Monotony.**

There is a note of monotony and dullness in Hardy's poetry. His colours are invariably gray. "He tells tales of tragic

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\* Scott James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

\*\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

irony, of frustrated love, of passion followed by disillusion, misery by deceit, of a teasing woman who provokes tragedy, of lost faith."\* All these lead to a feeling of monotony and unhappiness in the heart of the reader. "Never at any time is Hardy's poetry intoxicating or magical. Occasionally it approaches profundity, or rises towards a guarded exultation, but its chief characteristic is a '*satisfying flatness*.' It is satisfying because it presents the interesting spectacle of a mind continually probing and exploring; while its 'flatness' is produced by the persistent pressure of the Spirit of Negation."\*\*

### The Style and Diction of Hardy's Poems.

There is very little verbal felicity in Hardy's poems. Many of his lines are painfully prosaic. There is a wanton angularity of phrase in his poems. The charm of verbal felicity is lacking in them. The use of a variety of terms belonging to science and philosophy are in the opinion of A. C. Ward, "as disturbing as an ugly wound on an otherwise comely face." "His tardiness in obtaining recognition as a great poet may be due to the fact that with his harsh, prosaic diction and simple, often stark metre, he wrote like nobody else."†

### A. E. Housman (1859—1936).

The poetry of Housman bears a close affinity to that of Hardy. His poetic output was small, but it would be difficult to find a weak line in his slender production. "Everything was winnowed with scrupulous care, and he admitted nothing superfluous or merely decorative in form or style." He produced *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), *Last Poems* (1922), and *More Poems* (1936). The predominant mood in his poetry is one of 'cultured ironical disillusionment with life; though underlying this tragic view there is a warm appreciation for the beauties of nature particularly in the sixty three poems of *A Shropshire Lad* presenting the country life of the Welsh border. "Tragic in tone, often to the point of morbidity, the poems of Housman have the polished ease and restraint which might be expected of so fine a classical scholar. They are concise, sometimes epigra-

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

† Moody and Lovett : A History of English Literature.



mmatic in expression yet always perfectly easy to understand, and the emotion is handled with a sureness of touch which never mars an effect by over-emphasis."\* Housman dealt in his poetry with primitive themes in musical language, with a sweetness broken by irony and the tang of cruel disillusion. Music came to him under the stress of emotion, but it was controlled by his scholarly sense for metre.

The three themes which attract him are Soldiership, Love, and the Gallows. He has satirised war and soldiers. Love is something to be avoided in Housman's view. Love is connected irretrievably with death. Gallows attract him and the poem *The Culprit* expresses his horror of the gallows.

Housman is recognised as a pessimist in modern poetry. The lines in his *Other Summers* are soaked in pessimistic feeling—

*They came and were and are not,  
And came no more anew,  
And all the years and seasons  
That ever can ensue  
Must now be worse and few.*

"Yet strangely enough even the cruellest pessimism which thrust itself into his most charming ballads is not depressing; for we are in the presence of a strong if obstinate character, who finds exultation in his pessimism and his power of turning beauty into pain, pain into contempt, and both into accomplished verse."\*\*

It is Housman's love of Nature that relieves much of the tedium of his pessimistic thought. His nature poetry is passionate and unaffected. "His affectionate portrayal of the lovely details of Nature acts as an antiseptic to the gloom of his philosophy."

Housman's style is bleak and classical. There is a profusion of mono-syllables in his poetry. He certainly succeeds in evolving grand music.

A comparison between Housman and Hardy will not be out of place at this stage. "Hardy lived entrenched behind his sombre defences, Housman was out in the open, serene amid the

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\* R. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Scott-James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

battle—undismayed because entirely without hope :

*I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun,*

*Bui still, be still, my soul ; it is but for a season :*

*Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.*

Hardy was too sensitive to be actively a rebel ; Housman too resolute in an heroic despair.”\*

#### 4. Transitional Poets.

Robert Bridges, Gerald Manley Hopkins, William Butler Yeats, Francis Thompson, Gordon Bottomley were the main transitional poets who paved the way for the Georgian group of poets to be discussed in the next question. We will briefly deal with their works and their contribution to poetry.

##### Robert Bridges (1844—1930)

Robert Bridges who succeeded Alfred Austin as Poet-Laureate in 1913 has to his credit quite an appreciable body of poetry most of which is of a high quality. His first volume *Shorter Poems* appeared anonymously in 1873, and later on further volumes were brought out in 1879, 1880, 1890, 1894. *The Growth of Love*, a sonnet sequence, was published in 1889 after many alterations. In this collection there are seventy nine sonnets and they are a mixture of Petrarchan and Shakespearian form. They are marked with technical excellence but are without the depth of feeling which characterise the sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *The Sonnets of the Portugese*. *Prometheus the Firegiver* (1883) and *Eros and Psyche* (1885) are elaborate poems but they are over-lengthy and long winded. They present fine pictures of Italian countryside and exhibit Bridge's technical skill in the handling of the metre. *New Poems* (1889), a volume, contains some fine pieces of good landscapes. *Poems in classical Prosody* (1903) and *Later Poems* (1914) have poor stuff and the handling of the subject of war and politics does little credit to the poet's artistic genius. A change for the better is perceptible in *October and other Poems* (1928) and *New Verse* (1925), and most of the poems in these collections are lyrical. Memories of his childhood and experiences of his later years are all handled with the artistry of Bridges at his best. In 1929 was

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

produced the philosophical poem *The Testament of Beauty* which is the swan song of Bridge's life and is his lasting contribution to the poetic literature of his country. In this monumental work Bridges presents beauty as the supreme force in life and traces man's growth to perfect wisdom. The poem is a philosophical dissertation on the stages of human progress, and the function of the artistic spirit in leading mankind towards self control and self-knowledge. In this poem Bridges, "draws upon almost every field of knowledge, and the poem, over-lengthy and digressive, suffers from its unorthodox spellings and an unusual laxity in matters of technique. However, it contains many fine passages, and, in spite of its weakness, stands high among English philosophical poems on the grand scale."\*

#### **Bridge's Choice of Subject.**

Bridges was essentially an artist and naturally he chose to compose poetry on artistic subjects like Beauty, Love and Nature. In the poems of 1914 he had made attempts to bring politics and was in the field of poetry, but later on he gave up the idea of employing his muse on the rugged subjects of the hurly-burly of life and refused to have any traffic with the sterner issues of reality. "The beauties of nature, the charm of landscape in particular, the joy of romance of love, memories of an almost idyllic childhood, these are the themes which he treated with the good breeding and absence of passion demanded of a gentleman."\*\*

#### **Tranquillity and Peace in Bridge's Poetry.**

A contemplative and unfevered temper is needed to appreciate the poetry of Robert Bridges. An atmosphere of tranquillity spreads over his work. He does not raise his voice into a shout, nor his lamentations into loud sobs. "He is always serene : feeling is *contained* in his verse rather than expressed by it. His emotion is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity and this tranquil air is present in his landscape pieces also."

"Bridges is essentially a passionate writer, yet his passion has light without heat. His finest work has the chill beauty of a spring dawn—a dawn of gradually diffused silver gray, never merging

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

\*\* Ibid.

into anything warmer than a faint delicate amber. There are scarlets, no purple in his work. It expresses no thrill of wonder, no strange apocalypse of beauty ; merely a wistful surmise, or ecstasy so faint that unless we listen carefully to his tones we may miss it. He is reflective and pensive like Arnold ; he is austere cool like Lander.

#### As An Artist.

"What led me to poetry" Bridges has said, "was the inexhaustible satisfaction of form.....It was an art which I hoped to learn." Bridges has learnt the art very nicely and the stamp of the artist's pen is on every line of his verse. "The result is a limpid clarity of style, a delicacy of touch, a perfection of musical appeal, and a subtlety of rhythmic pattern which give his work an easy rightness. Yet his art, so wonderfully concealed, gives to his most personal poems a remoteness of feeling which betrays the careful craftsman lying behind them." (E. Albert).

#### As a Lyric Writer.

As a writer of lyrics, Bridges lacked the force and fire of Shelley's lyrics. He had too much of temperamental reserve to soar aloft on the wings of lyric fancy. His lyric poems are marked with artistic beauty, but the fire of passion and the heat of emotion do not kindle them. They are cold and tranquil like the rest of his poems.

#### As a Poet of Love.

Bridge's love poetry is found in *The Growth of Love*, a sonnet sequence. The love poems of Bridges are tranquil and lack tumultuous passion. They are free from violence and vehemence. The stamp of purity signalises them all. The purity of deep but quite affection prevails in his love poems. Dr. Cousin rightly remarks, "Here Mr. Bridges takes his place with honour among the great lovers in song, not great in exaltation or in depth but great in loyalty and purity." *Awake my heart, to be loved, awake* is one of the finest love-lyrics of the poet.

#### As a Poet of Joy and Optimism.

Bridges is the poet of joy and optimism. He is, in the words of Robert Lynd, "the poet of nine o'clock in the morning." We never miss in his poetry the note of joy and cheerfulness. He accepts life cheerfully, with all its ills, for he finds joy in the

simplest beauties of life. He says—

*Life and joy are one—we know not why,  
As though our very blood long breathless lain  
Had tasted of the breath of God again.*

**As a Poet of Beauty.**

Bridges is the direct descendant of Keats in the appreciation of beauty. His *Testament of Beauty* is a monumental work in this direction. According to Bridges earthly beauty is only a stepping stone to heavenly beauty. He says :

*All earthy beauty has one cause and proof,  
To lead the pilgrim soul to beauty above.*

Beauty, for Bridges, is not merely an earthly vision of womanly grace, but the manifestation of divine sublimity in human life—Beauty is

*The eternal spouse of the wisdom of God,  
And an Angel of His presence through all creation.*

**Bridges as the Poet of Nature and Landscapes.**

Bridges is a great lover of nature and portrays the landscapes of the South of England ‘bathed in a warm and comfortable glow.’ “His enjoyment of nature is personal and first hand and his expression of her beauty is simple and direct, unaffected by any artificial glow of imagination.” He presents the hills, the rivers, the meadows, and the clouds in a charming manner. There are no purple patches in his poetry of nature; his landscapes of the South country, of the Thomas Valley, are quite, sweet and peaceful, never wild, rugged or magnificent. The descriptive pieces are delightfully sweet and exquisitely beautiful. But their charm is that of peace and tranquillity. “I think the charm of Robert Bridges,” writes Lafcadio Hearn, “who is especially a nature poet, lies in his love of quiet effects, pale colours, small soft sounds, all the dreaminess and all the greatness of still and beautiful days.”

**As a Metrical Artist and Technician in Verse.**

It was Bridge’s effort to naturalise classical metres in English. He sought to introduce in the English language some of the richness of vowel sounds. “In the work of his early and middle life, in dramas, masks and shorter poems he attained a consistently

high level of metrical excellence.”\* Bridges threw light upon the laws and secrets of English versification and excited considerable interest in the study of metre and prosody.

Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844—89).

Hopkins stands out as a religious poet with religious proclivities. He was bred an Anglican, but became a Roman Catholic in 1866, and two years later entered the society of Jesuits. His early verses reveal his love for religion, nature and God. He glorifies God and his own soul in the early poems. In 1875 he wrote *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, his longest and most difficult poem, recounting the deaths of five nuns who went down in that ship (Deutschland). It is a pathetic poem marked with a tragic pathos. The last five years of Hopkins were spent in distress and he felt that God had forsaken him. This feeling urged him to write sonnets of personal character marked with a feeling of poignancy and depth. Before the end, he outsoared the shadow of the dark night of the soul and in his poem—*That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire, and of the Comfort of the Resurrection*, he regained his lost faith in God. He sees all Nature consumed to ashes and his soul alone standing imperishable like an ‘immortal diamond’ He continued to write verses in which he expressed his glorification of God, and His creation.

It has been suggested ‘that the poet in Hopkins was strangled by the priest’ This suggestion is partially true for the poetry of Hopkins, while glorifying God, is not without the queering sensibility for the beauties of nature. His appreciation of nature is deep and heartfelt. His early poetry before 1878 shows a sensuous love of nature.

Hopkins will be remembered for his diction and rhythmic innovation. In the choice of words, he exhibited personal idiosyncrasies. He believed that poetry called for a language distinct from that of prose, a language rich in suggestion both to the senses and the intellect. True to his belief he employed words which are archaic and colloquial in character. He used compound epithets such as, ‘drop-of-blood, foam-dapple cherry.’

He made experiment with *sprung rhythm* which made its

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\* Scott-James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

first appearance in *Wreck of the Deutschland*. This sprung rhythm had earlier been tried by Milton in *Samson Agonistes*, but it was Hopkins who gave it a new lease of life. The basic principle of this attempt, which breaks away from strictly conventional patterns, is that each foot contains one stress, possibly, but not necessarily, followed by any number of unstressed syllables.

Hopkins's *imagery* is rich and precise. He employs image of a suggestive character, and his pictures often suggest more than one interpretation. Often he combines emotional and intellectual figures which remind us of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets.

**William Butler Yeats (1865—1939).**

'W. B. Yeats was at the centre of the Irish Literary movement and was indispensable to its existence.' He was a poet and a dramatist, and all his creative work is marked with fine poetic touches. He harnessed his pen in the service of poetry for nearly fifty years and, "in fifty years he evolved from a dreamer to a realist, and from a realist to a passionate metaphysical seer. Thought and passion drove him all his life. He was a poet all the time, and a great poet."\*

The early poetry of Yeats is very much different in tone and temper from his later poetry. In the verses produced till 1900 we have in Yeats's poetry the dreaminess, picturesqueness and mythological love of the Pre-Raphaelite poets. 'In the easy charm and delicate, smooth-grace of his early work, the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites is clearly seen'. There is a mystical, dream like quality in the early poems to be found in *The Wanderings Of Oisín* (1899), *Poems* (1895), *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), and *The Shadowy Water* (1900). The study of these poems clearly reveals Yeats as a mystic and a laureate of the faery land. He seeks to find a refuge in the world of picturesque poetry from the materialism and the spiritual barrenness of the age. 'The boy's imagination entered fairyland, and he was bewitched for life into a longing for magic.' He delved deep into Irish love and he brought out the old life of the Irish people with their love for romance and magic. 'Life was a reservoir of racial memories,

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

from which the poet could draw by the magic of symbolic evocation'. "Ancient things and the stuff of dreams"—these words give the keynote of Yeats's entire poetic outlook in these early years of his poetic career. He was more at home in dreams than in actualities; more at ease in the world of symbols\* than in stern realities of life; more in company with Beauty and Nature than with the sordid and ugly things of life. It was at this period that Yeats felt shocked by ugly things and wrote. "The wrong of unshapely thing is a wrong too great to be told."

From 1900 onwards there came a change in Yeats's poetic outlook. The dreamer of dreams and the lover of old-far off things was shaken by the crude realities of life, and was drawn more and more to the vortex of a giddy life. Poetry for Yeats was now no more an escape from reality but became a grappling with the stern realities of the world. The increasing realism of this period is clearly noticed in *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914). The Irish troubles of 1916 and the Great War of 1914—1918 brought a change in his outlook and made him grim, gloomy, sorrowful and philosophical in his poetry. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *The Tower* (1923), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), *New Poems* (1938), *Last Poems* (1939), reveal tension between the dreamer and the man of affairs, between the poetic and the practical life. 'The heaven's embroidered cloth' may still be seen in the poems of this period, but the edges are frayed, and there is, instead, the majesty of starkness. The mists have grown thick and impenetrable about him. As T. Maynard has put it, "the poet is wandering in a choking fog, feverishly striking matches in the gloom and hiding them underneath his waterproof!"

In the poems of this period a note of suffering and sadness is clearly perceptible. The poet will now make the 'cloak of sorrow.' It is 'the hour of the wanting of love.' Romance and the fairy world are no longer there. 'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone'. The dawn of evil age is envisaged by the poet. The poetry of this period proves that, "no poet has been successful in escaping from earth and making his poetry exclusively from the

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\*\* Yeats has employed the symbol of 'Rose' and 'Tower' in his poetry and is influenced by the work of the French Symbolists.



tapestries of heaven.”\*

The entire poetic production of Yeats is marked with limpid and languorous ease. The verse bears the qualities of the Irish national character—moody, showy, and dreamy. His artistry is unchallenged. His melody and music, the singing quality in his poetry, rings through all his poems. Yeats, above all, is a singer, and the flow of his lines, particularly in his lyrics, is limpid and enthrallingly captivating.

His *artistry* is something which impresses all his readers “From the first, Yeats was an accomplished poetic artist, though his mastery of language and rhythm grew steadily throughout his career. From the Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism of his early verse, with its quest for beauty, its conscious, often sentimental simplicity, and its languid, melodic grace, he developed a more direct and virile expression. There is the same delicacy of workmanship, and the gorgeous phrase still flashes among the everyday language and personal direct expression of his maturity.”\*\*

## OTHER TRANSITIONAL POETS.

Gordon Bottomley (1874—1948).

Bottomley, the dramatist, was the writer of romantic poems. His work marks out the influence of D. G. Rossetti. “Reading his poems we see him developing from within outwards, using as the raw material of his experience what has come to him from literature, legend, myth, and investing the life that he does see around him with the quality of legend and myth, showing man in the round, larger than life, more heroic or more villanous, more elemental.”† His poems are remarkable for their images. Visibility, sound and even odour provide him the stuff of his images. In *The End of the World* we find Bottomley giving us the image of a world where desolating cold envelops everything—

*The coldness seemed more nigh, the coldness deepened*

*As a sound deepens into silences;*

*It was of earth and came not by the air;*

*The earth was cooling and drew down the sky.*

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\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

\*\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

† Scott-James : Fifty Years of English Literature.

Bottomley will be remembered for romance, magic and heroic happenings. His poetry 'deals in portents and magic and heroic happenings and in human life rarefied and universalized.'

**William Watson.**

He is almost forgotten to-day, but he stood high at the turn of the century. His *Shorter Poems* and *Wordsworth's Grave* are memorable. After a verse tale, *The Prince's Quest* (1880), written in the style of William Morris, Watson turned his face against romantic poetry and revived the ideal of the eighteenth century, "What oft was thought but never so well expressed." He maintained dignity of style and expressed his thoughts in rich diction.

**Francis Thompson (1860—1907).**

Among the religious writers of the age Francis Thompson holds a very high place. He is known by his two poems *The Hounds of Heaven* and *In No Strange Land*. *The Hounds of Heaven* is a gorgeous poem presenting in majestic and gold-like images the pursuit of flying man from the hounds of heaven. It is thick-sown with metaphor, and full of the echoes of Crawshaw, Donne and Spenser. This poem clearly shows that Thompson intended to use words 'as the maker of tapestry uses his threads, to weave a beautiful pattern, making of poetry an art confined within the limits of the pictorial and melodious.' *In No Strange Land* is a poem of mysticism, and is free from the flamboyant note of the first poem. His other poems are to be found in *New Poems* (1897).

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**Q. 127. Write a note on Georgian Poetry and Georgian Poets.**

**Ans.** Georgian poetry covers the period from 1910 to 1935 when George V was the King presiding over the destinies of the British empire. The poetry of this period was issued in five volumes, dated respectively 1911—12, 1913—15, 1916—17, 1918—19 and 1920—22, edited by Sir Edward Marsh who died in 1953. The poets who figured prominently in these volumes were Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, G. K. Chesterton, W. H. Davies, Walter De La Mare, John Drinkwater,

James Elroy Flecker, W. W. Gibson, D. H. Lawrence, John Masefield, Harold Monro, T. Sturge Moore, Ronald Ross, W. J. Turner, J. C. Squire, Siegfried Sasson, J. Rosenberg, Robert Nicholas, Robert Graves, John Freeman, Maurice Baring, Edward Shanks, Edmund Blunden and Mortin Armstrong. "In reading this list of representative poets we must conclude that if the quantity of poets engaged is in any way equalled by their quality this period must indeed have been one of great poetic 'strength and beauty.'"\*

What were the general features of Georgian poetry? What did they set about doing in the realm of poetry? These are pertinent questions and deserve a critical examination. "The Georgians had, of course, a positive aim: it was to treat natural things in a clear, natural and beautiful way neither too modern, nor too like Tennyson."\*\* In their treatment of nature and social life they discarded the use of archaic diction such as 'thee' and 'thou', and eschewed such poetical constructions as "winter drear", and 'host on armed host.' They dropped all gorgeous and grandiloquent expressions and generally avoided pomposities of thought and expression. In reaction to Victorianism their verse avoided 'all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes', and in reaction to the decadent poets of the nineties they avoided all subjects that smacked of "sadness, wickedness and cafe-table." They were neither imperialistic nor pantheistic but 'as simple as a child's reading book.' Their subjects were to be, "Nature, love, leisure, old age, childhood, animals, sleep, unemotional subjects." The Georgian poets wrote extremely neat and very melodious poems about sheep, bulls and other domestic or wild animals. They also celebrated in pleasing verse the charm of various localities in the British Isles. Quietly they longed for the good old days and ways.

Commenting on the general nature and contribution of Georgian poetry E. Albert very nicely remarks, "These poets had, of course, their clearly recognizable individual qualities, but were

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\* Scott-James—Fifty Years of English Literature. 'Strength and beauty' refer to Marsh's observation on Georgian poetry in the Preface.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

alike in their rejection of the ideas of the decadents, their quest for simplicity and reality, their love of natural beauty, especially as found in the English landscape, and their adherence to the forms and techniques of the main traditions of English poetry. In their own way they, too, were escapist; for the most part, their work shows little awareness of the industrial world around them, and often it has an all too obvious facility of technique and shallowness of feeling.”\*

Georgian poetry has been subjected to severe criticism. Robert Graves, who once belonged to this group, criticised the Georgian poets in his *Common Asphodel* published in 1949. The reaction of the next generation was “rather to be that they were merely writing nice poetry for nice people, and that they were too inclined to indulge in mutual praise.”\*\*

Having pointed out the general features of Georgian poetry, let us now examine the work of the prominent Georgian poets.

John Masefield (1878—).

John Masefield succeeded Robert Bridges as poet Laureate in 1930, and is still adorning this title of fame with dignity and distinction. Masefield is a poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist and essayist.

Masefield's early poetry was written in the style and manner of Kipling and was marked with a note of action and adventure. It was characterised by Chaucerian breadth of humanity. *Salt-Water Ballads* (1902) brought out his genius as a poet to the forefront, and the poems in this volume reveal him as a lover of the sea. Written from first-hand experience, they blend a sense of the romance and beauty of the sea with a thorough knowledge of seamen.” *Ballads and Poems* (1910) reveals advance in technical skill. *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911) is the first great narrative poem of Masefield. It deals with the conversion of a drunken poacher by a Methodist woman. Saul Kene, the drunkard narrates his own story in a language which is extremely realistic, coarse, and brutal. “The violent, often crude realism of this poem in acto-syllabic couplets is deliberately shocking

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\* E. Albert—A History of English Literature.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

protest against the anemia which afflicted contemporary poetry." It was followed in a similar vein by *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912), *The Daffodil Fields* (1913) and *Lollingdown Down* (1917). "With these four poems Mr. Masfield poured new life into English narrative verse. No old far-off-themes and stately diction for him, but common contemporary life in the raw, described in outspoken, almost brutal language—the conversion of a hardened ruffian, the hanging of a widow's son",\* *Dauber* (1913) is an autobiographical poem describing the life of a youth who runs away to sea, and contains many reminiscences of the poet's early life. It is realistic in tone but has many fine passages 'which catch the wonder and magic of the sea.' *Reynard the Fox* (1919) and *Right Royal* (1920) are vigorous narrative poems describing the fox-hunt in a vivid manner. In *Reynard the Fox* we have 'a little Odyssey of fox-hunting.' It contains many Chaucerian thumb-nail sketches of human character. Here the poet is 'in control of his rhythm and metres, and not their slave as in the earlier narrative poems.' These poems "though vigorously realistic are more natural in tone and show his love for country life." *Reynard the Fox*, in the opinion of A. C. Ward, "is among the best sustained narrative poems written in the quarter century." The other collections of Masfield's verse are to be found in *Midsu mmer Night* (1928), *Collected Poems* (1932), *End and Be ginning* (1934) and *Wondering* (1943).

Masfield is the poet of the people and his poetry is surcharged with democratic sympathy for the downtrodden and the miserable suffering people. In *Consecration* he made an avowal of his faith in the under-dog—

*Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,  
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth,  
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the  
earth.*

Masfield and Gibson combine, very beautifully, realism with romance and beauty. Masfield's poetry is marked with a strong feeling for realism, and sometimes it becomes coarse and brutal, ugly and sordid.

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\* Grierson & Smith—A Critical History of English Poetry.

Lines like :

*I'll bloody him a bloody fix*

*I'll bloody burn his bloody ricks*

disfigure his verses. But strangely enough, this poet of realism is also a romanticist and a lover of beauty, and glimpses of both of romance and beauty are discernible in his poems like *The Seekers* and *Cargoes* :

*That beauty I have sought*

*In women's hearts, friends, in many a place*

*In barren hours passed at grips with thought,*

*Beauty of women, comrade, earth and sea,*

*Incarnate thought came face to face with me.*

Love poetry, too, is attempted by Masfield but there is a note of sadness in his vision of love. He sees the beloved in her coffin or in her grave, as in *Waste*, *The Watch in the Wood* and *When Bony Death*. His mind never seems to forget that

*Death has a lodge in lips as red as cherries,*

*Death as a mansion in the Yew-tree berries.*

Masfield is the laureate of the sea and few poets have been able to capture the atmosphere of the sea, the ships, and sailors as vividly and realistically as he has done in *Dauber & Sea-Fever*. He knows the sea and ships.

Masfield's love for Nature and the country side is well presented in *Reynard the Fox* and *Right Royal*. He loves the English landscape and although no part of his poetry deals directly and primarily with the cultivation of the soil, it gives a many sided picture of rural England.

Masfield's philosophic thought runs through his poetry. He has leaning towards Pantheism—

*There is no God ; but we, who breathe the air,*

*Are God ourselves, and touch God everywhere.*

He believes in the immortality of the Soul—

*I hold that when a person dies*

*His soul returns again to earth.*

Masfield presents the tragedy of life, but he bows reverently at its grandeur and its greatness.

Masfield's poetry suffers from many faults—a coarse brutal realism expressed in slangy and violent phraseology and an

occasional over-emphasis. His genius has a mixture of journalism in it. But on the whole Masfield's contribution has been substantial and he deserves all praise for his narrative poems, his democratic feeling of sympathy, his love for nature, and his appreciation for the country side.

**Walter De La Mare (1873— )**

Among the distinguished poets of the Georgian period Walter De La Mare stands on a high pedestal. He is essentially the laureate of the fairy land, creating in his poetry a world of dreams, fantasies and imagination appealing to children as well as to grown up people. In *The Listeners and Other Poems* (1912) *Peacock Pie* (1913) *The Fleeting and Other Poems* (1933) *Collected Poems* (1902—18) *Poems for Children* (1930) *Bells and Grass* (1941) *The Burning Glass and Other Poems* (1945) *The Traveller* (1946) we have the best of Walter De La Mare's poetic genius.

Walter De La Mare is, in the words of Theodore Maynard, "formally and by profession a children's poet." He has very successfully captured the spirit of childhood in his *Songs of Childhood* and his poems remind the reader of the work of Blake, Coleridge, Tagore, and W. B. Yeats. He has captured the joys and the pleasures of child life. In his later volumes, the simple, innocent joys of childhood are marred by the regrets and thwartings of manhood. But in spite of the note of sadness, Walter De La Mare in his *Peacock Pie* and *Come Hither* continues to be a childhood with such vividness and insight as De La Mare has done in his poetry. His child poetry exhibits an astonishing variety. It contains nursery rhymes, stories and songs.

Walter De La Mare's child-poetry confirms the opinion of Dr. Collins "that the psychological insight of the poet is of the subtlest, and that a fine intellect partners the imagination of childhood" His vision of childhood is coloured by the imagination and intellect of a grown up adult, and as such his poems provide joy to children as well as to grown up persons. Charming innocence is not the whole content of *Peacock Pie* or any other of De La Mare's book. There is also something of the adult's vision in his poems of child-life.

Another distinguishing feature of De La Mare's poetry is

the note of fantasy and dreaminess. He is the laureate of the fairy land. Fairies, phantoms and mysterious presences haunt his poems. He does not deal with the problems of life, but seeks to escape from them in the world of childhood, and fairies. In the words of Shanks, "He is the poet of lost paradises. Almost all his poetry expresses dissatisfaction with his world, with this life, and a straining towards something more to be desired." "Moonlight, quietness, mystery and magic envelop his poems. His poetry moves 'out of the dream of wake' into the dream of sleep. The world in which he seeks to move is not the world of hard rugged realities, but a world, 'pieced together by the imagination of childhood, made up of childish memories of fairy tales ballads, and nursery rhymes."

The charm of Walter De La Mare's poetry lies in suggesting an atmosphere of weirdness and uncanniness—an atmosphere of the supernatural and the world of dreaminess. In *The Listeners* and *The Mocking Fairy* the fine atmosphere of stillness and quietness of moonlit night has been created.

Walter De La Mare's lyrics and the melody of his verses are captivating. He preferred lyric to epic poetry. "Why write epics, when a lyric may equally well suggest the boundless and inexhaustible immensity of the works of God ?

The poetry of Walter De La Mare is marked with a note of wistfulness and sadness. He knows that beauty and love fade, and that human life is transient and passing :

*Beauty vanishes, beauty passes,*

*However rare—rare it be.*

But De La Mare derives some consolation in the thought that 'when the rose fades its memory may still dwell on.' The single individual may die and his beauty may end, but the beauty of Nature will continue to hold us in thrall.

Walter De La Mare is a master artist and a superb craftsman in verse. His verses have a cadence and subtlety of rhythm which linger, rise and fall like the tremulous fall of a snow-flake. All this wizardry of music and technical perfection is achieved without the least sign of artifice or labour. It has the ease and effortlessness of the highest art.



**Edmund Blunden (1896)—**

Edmund Blunden is essentially a poet of nature and pastoral life. "He is primarily a pastoral poet, seeking inspiration in the sights, sounds and smells of the English countryside, subjects which he has handled with a Shelleyan lucidity and a technical subtlety which has yet allowed the authentic rural spirit to shine through his verse." In his early verses he had the gifts of the Georgians but later on his opinion reacted against the Georgian school as a whole. He started writing about the horrors of war. But later on he again turned his gaze back to the peace and beauty of nature. His best work is to be found in *English Poems* (1925) *Poems* (1930,40) *Shells by a Stream* (1944) *After the Bombing* (1948). His poems of English country-side are to be seen in *The Face of England* (1932) *English Villages* (1941), *Cricket Country* (1944). For him as for Keats, "The poetry of Earth is never dead."

**Lascelles Abercrombie (1881—1938)**

"Abercrombie was one of the original contributors to *Georgian Poetry* and, though his work reflected at various times his interest in nearly all the major writers from Tennyson to Bridges, his greatest enthusiasm was for the blend of the emotional and intellectual which he found in the poets of the metaphysical school." He presented in his poetry metaphysical and spiritual problems in a manner which failed to grip the attention of the reader. He expressed his thoughts in a compressed and somewhat angular blank verse, making excursions often into the dramatic monologue. He had metrical skill and command of rhythmic harmonies, but with all these he could not be popular. "He had not the qualities to make him either truly great or widely popular, and it is, perhaps, significant that we find him devoting most of his last twenty years of his life mainly to literary criticism."

**James Elroy Flecker (1884—1915)**

The main bulk of Flecker's poetry is to be found in *The Bridge of Fire* (1907), *The Last Generation* (1908), *Forty Two Poems* (1911), *The Golden Journey* (1913), *The Old Ships* (1915), *The Burial in England God Save the King* (1915).

Flecker, who became famous by his poetic drama *Hassan* is essentially the poet of the East dwelling in the world of orien-

tal grandeur and magnificence. His mental affinities were oriental and his craving for the east was a part of his poetic nature. He was enthralled by the exotic novelty and illusive romanticism of the east. He captures the east in its coloured and voluptuous side but he does not commit the mistake of being too serious. He takes everything with a certain gaiety and irony. "In my exotic poems" he says, "I feel that there should be a most vigilant humour in the poem and parade of nicely chosen words."

Flecker is the master of jewelled phrase and gem-like verse and succeeds in capturing the gorgeousness of the east in the golden panoply of his words. "He delights in the very names of exotic things and distant places, and master as he is of dazzling phrase and supple rhythm, he seldom fails to evoke an answering delight in the reader."\*

**Ralph Hodgson (1871— )**

The poetical output of Ralph Hodgson is not very large, though the little that he has produced is impressive. He has a very high conception of poetry and does not desire to make poetry a source of living. His works include *The Bull* (1913) *Eve and other Poems* (1913), *The Song of Honour* (1913), *Poems* (1917).

Hodgson's ideal of poetry is very high. He has taken to poetry in the spirit of a dedicated poet and whatever has come out of his pen is of a high order. There is little dross in his work.

There are two prominent qualities in Hodgson's works. He has an intense love for outdoor life, and an intense love for animals particularly bulls, birds and dogs. In his poetry the love for animals comes out directly from his heart. In *The Bells of Heaven* and *The Bull* we find Hodgson at his best voicing his protest against all those who cruelly treat animals and subject them to inhuman hardships of the circus. *The Song of Honour* reveals Hodgson as a deep and intense religious poet. The whole creation is pressed into singing adoration to God. The living and non-living all join in the chorus of applause and praise the Creator.

Hodgson's purely descriptive poems, though entirely objective, show a deep strain of reflection. We admire his power to

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\* Gerald Bullett : *Modern English Poetry*.

visualize and make us see the picture he is drawing. This is best illustrated in *The Bull*. So consummate is this power of description and visualization that we do not worry about any lapses with which he may be suffering. "So consummate is this power of visualization" says Mary C. Sturgeon, "that it dominates other qualities and might almost cheat us into thinking that they do not exist."

W. W. Gibson (1878— )

W. W. Gibson is a prolific writer and his main work as a poet is found in *Collected Poems* (1905—25) covering nearly 800 pages. His other volumes of poetry are *The Golden Helm* (1903), *The Note of Love* (1905), *Stone-Fields* (1907), *Daily Bread* (1910), *Fires* (1912), *Thoroughfares* (1914), *Borderland Battle* (1915), *Likelihood* (1917), *Home and Neighbours* (1920), *I heard a Sailor* (1925), *The Golden Broom* (1928) and *Hazards* (1930).

The poetic career of Gibson broadly falls into three divisions. In his early works before the publication of *Daily Bread* (1910), there is an air of romanticism. The poet roams in the world of fables and romances and his muse is preoccupied with Arthur, Helen of Troy, the dim moonlight of romance and chivalry :

*I sang of lovers and she praised my song  
The while the king looked on her with cold eyes.*

Soon a change came in the life of the poet and he emerged from the world of romance to immerse in the strife of industrial and realistic life. The second period of Gibson's poetic career is that of a realist interested not in romance and supernaturalism, but in the problems of industrial life and factory workers, miners, stokers and chimney sweepers. He exhibits a rare imaginative intimacy with the ardours and austerities of low life lived close to the earth. In the poems published in *Daily Bread* there is an air of grimness and bleakness. The poet is face to face with the grim world of reality, desolate with the ravages of industrialism. He discovers in the life of the workers and the toilers a spirit of true heroism. He finds courage in the lives of factory girls, stone-breakers, printers, fishermen and labourers—

*All life moving to one measure—  
Daily bread, daily bread—*

*Bread of life and bread of labour  
Bread of bitterness and bread of sorrow,  
Hand- to-mouth and not to-morrow,  
Death for housemate, death for neighbour.*

The desire for realism is evident in the changed style and versification of the poet. Instead of dazzling flight of song and melodious use of soft words, we have short, unrhymed, ejaculatory lines, rising and falling from turgent torrents into sobbing melody.

The tone of harshness and bitterness, realism and bleakness once again changes into mellowness and cheerfulness in the third period of Gibson's poetic career. "The spirit of this later work remained humanitarian, but it is not centred solely upon the tragic aspects of the worker's lives. A wider range is taken and comedy enters with an accession of urbanity from which the poem gains a mellower note. The world of nature too, banished for a time in the exclusive study of humanity returns to enrich this poetry."\*

In short, Gibson's poetry reveals three phases and three stages. The first is imitative and pseudo-Tennysonian, the second is noted for its stern realism mingled with a feeling of humanitarianism and sympathy for the poor and humble folk of the modern industrial age, the last is characterised by mellowness and philosophic serenity rising out of his observation of human life. It is, however, by the work of his second period, that Gibson will be remembered in the future age to come.

W. H. Davies (1879—1940).

W. H. Davies reveals himself in *The Autobiography of a Super Tramp* (1908). He tells us that it was after the loss of a leg while attempting to board a train that he turned to poetry for a living and produced a few volumes of verses, which caught the public eye. Among his volumes of verses are *The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems* (1905), *New Poems* (1907), *Collected Poems* (1916, 1928, 1934) and *Love Poems* (1935).

Davies is essentially a poet of lyricism. His lyrics are short and spontaneous. With the exception of A. E. Housman, most

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\* Miss Mary Sturgeon—Studies of Contemporary Poets.

of Davies's poems are probably shorter than those of any other modern writer. Out of 400 poems in *Collected Poems*, two hundred and seventy are of three stanzas or less. Much of Davies's lyricism is marked with 'spontaneous outflow,' though in some poems the lyric impulse is not very strong.

Davies is the *poet of Nature and pastoral life*. He presents the sights and scenes of nature, as well as the innocent country people living in the rural areas. The poet has succeeded in creating a world of vivid amazement and intense joy, a world of sunrises, cows and sheep, owls and cuckoos, butterflies and squirrels in his poetry. He is himself happiest as a nature-poet—

*Call me a nature poet, nothing more*

*Who writes of simple things, not human evil.*

Davies is not a very accurate, precise and scientific observer of Nature. He does not seek to portray Nature with the eye of a scientific observer. He realises his weakness and states—

*Let others praise thy parts, sweet Nature, I*

*Who cannot know the barley from the oats*

*Nor call the bird by note, nor name a star*

*Claim thy heart's fullness through the face of things.*

Davies makes mistakes in describing and presenting the seasons of the year, their flora, and fauna, but underlying his appreciation of nature we can feel the zest of his heart—

*A rainbow and a cuckoo's song*

*May never come together again*

*May never come*

*This side the tomb.*

Davies is not mystical and metaphysical in his approach to nature. He is not concerned with discovering any philosophy or system behind the scenes of nature. He simply presents the sights of nature in their freshness. "While Walter De La Mare" says Robert Lynd, "has the genius for making us look on lovely things as though for the last time, Mr. Davies has the gift for making us look at them, as if for the first time."

There is a *note of tender sympathy* in Davies's poems dealing with animals, children and grown up people. He has a sense of the tramp's comradeship with the horse, the cow, the sheep, the cuckoo and the butterfly (Cf. *Nature's Friend, The*

*Butterfly, In May, Early Morn).*

He presents the hardship of the unemployed and overworked poor people and speaks of them with real feeling.

Davies's *child Poetry* is fairly attractive though we do not come across in his child-poems the wonder of Walter De La Mare's dreamland. Davies writes of a happy child, the weeping child, and the sick child. The dramatic surprise that greets us at the end of *The Two Children* brings home to our mind the irony and sadness of childhood's illusions.

There are touches of gloominess and despair in Davies' poetry, but generally speaking the air of pleasantry and joy pervades his poetry. The rapture of Davies's songs is as fresh as that of his favourite thrush. A genuine spontaneity is the secret of much of his appeal :

*Come, let us laugh—though there's no wit to hear,  
Come, let us sing—though there's no listener near;  
Come, let us dance, though none admire our grace,  
And be the happier for a private place.*

Davies has penned a few love poems but they are of the sense. He has little spirituality in conjuring up Platonic visions of love. He is content to idolize his beloved who prefers to stay at home rather than move out to exotic lands. He has all praise for "sweet stay-at home, sweet well content."

Davies's poems are "a miracle of simplicity and artlessness." There is the lack of depth and profundity in his poetry—

*This Davies has no depth,  
He writes of birds, of staring cows and sheep,  
And throws no light on deep eternal things.*

His poetry suffers from many faults—banalities of thought and emotion, occasional bathos, defective technique, bad rhymes, repetition, lack of intellectual force, absence of a message—but with all his faults we love him and like to read his lyrics, for in their restrained simplicity and artless spontaneity, they remind of Worthworth and Herrick.

Edward Thomas (1878—1917).

Edward Thomas is essentially a poet of nature and resembles the Georgians in his love for the countryside and natural simplicity. He sings of the objects of English countryside and

sincerely presents his subtle reactions to nature as well as to modern life. "The sense of 'newness' given by his poetry came from a feeling that it was written by one whose vision and music were free from glints and echoes of other's work. He sang as though he were the first and only poet, and there was a curious absence of conscious literary effort in his choice of material."\*

**John Drinkwater (1882—1937).**

John Drinkwater's poetry in *Collected Poems* (1923—1937) reveals him as an intellectual poet interested not in lyrics and songs but in elegiac, meditative and harlatory verse. His poems in *Poems of Men and Hour* (1911), *Poems of Love and Earth* (1912), exhibit his gravity and earnestness, his sanity and rigorous discipline. He presents the puritan spirit of mid-England in his poetry. He is a self-conscious artist, and pens his lines in the 'cold ink of thought,' rather than in the, 'red blood of a fired brain.' 'His work is always controlled in emotion and expression. There is little of the *furor poeticus*, and his language and imagery shows him to be a deliberate, careful craftsman of rather limited gifts.' His imagery shines not as a star or a flower but like a jewel, a priceless gem of art. 'He speculates, meditates, ruminates, but only rarely illuminates, other than as the glow-worm illuminates his self and his own surroundings.'\*\*

John Drinkwater will be remembered for his nature poetry. He represented and celebrated "the English countryside, its streams and pools and woods, its birds and cattle and flowers, its shepherds and gypsies, with a cultured pastoral fancy untroubled by any urgencies." Only Shanks among the Georgians stands out the compeer of Drinkwater in the appreciation of nature and the countryside.

**Alfred Noyes (1880—1958).**

Alfred Noyes is a distinguished poet of the Georgian school. It was recorded that Noyes was 'the only modern poet who could make poetry even the epic play.'† The first volume of his poetry came out in 1902 when he was twenty two years of age. In 1914 was published his famous twelve-book epic *Drake*. In 1920 his

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\* A. C. Ward : *Twentieth Century Literature*.

\*\* Coulson Kernahan : *Six Famous Living Poets*.

† Manly & Ricket : *Contemporary British Literature*.

*Collected Poems* reached a third volume. His *Tales of Mermaid Tavern* had a peculiar fascination for young readers.

"The main difference between Alfred Noyes and the other duller of the Georgians is that their stock was smaller and more pretentious than his, and that they cried their wares more lustily. He lingered in the declining Victorian twilight, they belonged to the Georgian false dawn."\*

Noyes had a fascination for the brave Elizabethan world, and produced a heroic account of the exploits of the age in *Drake* and called back prominent Elizabethan figures to poetic life in *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern*. "In all, the muse of Alfred Noyes was at once serious with big high purpose and alive with high spirits and humour, robust and delicate, real and fantastic. Ears that later learnt other and less tuneful music turned against his varied and catching melodies, just as his love of colour and of adjectives and his often care free spontaneity later pained a more austere taste."\*\*

**Harold Monro (1879 – 1932).**

The poetry of Harold Monro who made his Poetry Book Shop in Bloomsbury "is more urban and realistic than that of the other Georgians. He attempted more strenuously than they to poeticize the circumstances of modern life, and, although, his vein is a shallow one, he worked it with vigour and honesty. More than any other Georgian, he felt the need for a renovation of the technique of poetry. The realistic element in the diction of much post war verse owes much to Monro's early experiments in such volumes as *Real Property* (1922), *The Earth for Sale* (1928)."

**G. K. Chesterton (1874 – 1936).**

G. K. Chesterton was a man of versatile genius and signalled his career as a journalist, pamphleteer, biographer, historian, novelist, short story writer and poet. "Of the several volumes of poetry which he published it suffices to say that *they contain more verse than poetry*" and there is a general absence of depth in what he has left behind. His collections of verse include *The Wild Knight and Other Poems* (1900), *The Ballad of White Horse* (1911),

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : *English Literature of the 20th Century*.

\*\* A. C. Ward : *Twentieth Century Literature*.

† Moody & Lovett : *A History of English Literature*.



*Wine, Water and Song*, (1915), *Poems* (1915), *The Ballad of St. Barbara* (1922) and *Collected Poems* (1933).

Chesterton's poetry reveals his religious fervour and his moralistic vein. He was not one of those poets who wrote merely for the glorification of art. He did not belong to the school of 'Art for Art's sake.' He was a devout Roman Catholic and in his poetry there are solemn and serious touches of religion. He brought the spirit of Catholicism in English poetry particularly in his hymns and war ballads.

"The best-section of G. K. Chesterton's verse is the group of road-songs and drinking-songs scattered through the novel *The Flying Inn* and *Wine, Water and Songs*. Their combination of wisdom and nonsense, humour and high spirits is irresistible and unique and these (together with one impressive 'serious' lyric *Donkey*) constitute Chesterton's indispensable contribution to English poetry."\* Chesterton has left behind a number of beer-songs, parodies and satires. These poems lack spontaneity and refinement but they are racy and jolly fine. His parodies entitled *Answers to the Poet* are delightfully humorous, and the journalistic note in some of them makes them quite piquant and sharp.

Chesterton will go down to posterity by his war poetry. The ballads, and war poems such as *Lepanto*, *The Ballad of St. Barbara*, *The Ballad of White Horse* are stirring poems and have the martial twinkle and twang about them. These poems abound in dramatic descriptions of characters and incidents. The narration is vigorous and effective.

Chesterton may be lacking in the exquisite metrical artistry and inventiveness of Walter De La Mare, 'the butterfly genius' of William Henry Davies, or the refined native crudity of his friend Hillaire Belloc, but he will safely go down to posterity as a great poet by his fervent hymns and spirited war-ballads, as unconventional perhaps, as his personal appearance with 'unkempt curly hair, shaggy reddish brown moustache and his careless clothes. As a journalist or a writer of fine paradoxes he may continue to captivate a vast majority of thoughtless readers, but nothing can give us a truer glimpse of his greatness as a man than his slipshod

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\* A. C. Ward : *Twentieth Century Literature*.

bold and outspoken poetry exulting in the triumphant vision of Christianity, which bears an unmistakable impression of his vigorous personality.”\*

Chesterton's friend Hillaire Belloc (1870–1953) wrote poems, and “the poetry of both of them was characterised by its love of God and its love of earth, by romantic idealism and an ironic laughter at contemporary follies, by the praise of wine and by the understanding of children.”\*\* Belloc's nature poems particularly the lyrics of *The South Country* and his satirical and moralistic *Cautionary Tales for Children*, are particularly delightful and proclaim him as a lover of nature, children, religion and moral life.

**Q. 128. Write a note on the Imagists as a reaction to the Georgians.**

**Ans.** In the years immediately preceding the first World War there were a few poets who started a reaction against Georgian poetry, which they criticised as facile and loose-appealing to the general public fighting shy of modernism. These reactionaries called themselves Imagists, and they kept before them the object of representing real life in images that were clear, precise and exact. The leader of this school T. E. Hulme (1833–1917) insisted that, “poetry should restrict itself of the world perceived by the senses, and to the presentation to its themes in a succession of concise, clearly visualized, concrete images accurate in detail and precise in significance.”† The Imagists aimed “at hard, clear, brilliant effects instead of the soft, dreamy vagueness or the hollow Miltonic rhetoric of the English Nineteenth Century tradition.”‡ They aimed at the clarity and concentration of the classic Chinese lyric and the Greek epigram. The Imagists defined poetry “as the presentation of a visual situation in the fewest possible concrete words, lightened of the burdens of conventional adjectival padding, and unhampered by general ideas or philosophical or moral speculations.” For the expression

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\* Dr. R. A. Misra : Chesterton, The Poet.

\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

† E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

‡ V. D. S. Pinto : Crisis in Modern Poetry.

of their thoughts they evolved new rhythms and laid particular emphasis on *verse libre*. The Imagists wanted to create a very precise and concentrated expression of a new sort of consciousness *for which the traditional techniques were inadequate*, and naturally he made experiments in *verse libre* which provided them unlimited freedom of free expression. The new rhythms of the Imagists bore a close affinity to those of everyday speech and were far away from conventional verse patterns.

Hulme's leadership was followed in America and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Ezra Pound adopted the new technique which Pound characterised as Imagism. The Imagists brought out a magazine *The Egoist*, and later on published three volumes of Imagist Poetry and published an anthology of Imagist poetry called *Des Imagistes* in (1914). The main contributors were F. S. Flint, Richard Aldington, F. M. Hulffer, Amy Lowell and D. H. Lawrence.

Imagism could not cut much ice. "The limitation of Imagism was that it concentrated too exclusively on a new technique, holding that the subject was relatively unimportant."\* "The pursuit of the sequence of very concise images and the use of *verse libre* often led to obscurity and licence, and the movement was strongly criticised and quickly died out. Yet Hulme's conception of the clearly visualized; concrete image is one of the most distinctive underlying ideas of later poetry, and its effect is seen particularly clearly in the work of T. S. Eliot and the poets of the Thirties"\*\*. "Imagism did modern poetry a tremendous service by pointing the way to a renovation of the vocabulary of poetry and to the necessity of ridding poetic technique of vague and empty verbiage and dishonest and windy generalities."†

The following poem *Garden* by H. D. will give to the reader an idea of Imagist poetry—

*O wind, rend open the heart,  
Cut apart the heat,  
Rend it to tatters.  
Fruit cannot drop,*

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

\*\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

† Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

*Through this thick air.  
Cut the heat,  
Plough through it,  
Turning it on either side of your path.*

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**Q. 129. Write a note on The Poetry of the Great War of (1914—1919) and evaluate the work of the Soldier Poets**

**Ans.** The Great War of (1914—1918) exercised a considerable influence on English poetry of the Georgian Period. The poetry produced by the War was not all of a single note. While we hear laudatory verses coming out from elder poets who stayed at home, we are shocked by the note of cynicism, satire and realism struck by poets who had actually been to the war field and had witnessed the horrors of warfare.

Those who wrote gloriously of war and patriotism, of sacrifice and victory, were the elder poets : Kipling, Freeman, Hardy and Lawrence Binyon. These poets sang of the nobility of self sacrifice and the sublimity of patriotism. They regarded war as a call to duty and a time of trial for the nation.

**Kipling** was among the leaders of the glorifiers of war. In his famous poem *For All We Have and We Are*, he exhorted the people of his country to be patriotic and hail war with enthusiasm—

*There is but one task for all  
One life for each to give,  
Who stands if Freedom fall ?  
Who dies if England lives.*

**John Freeman** struck the note of optimism and hope in the poem *Happy is England Now*, and he left elated in presenting the march of soldiers to the war. He wrote—

*There is not anything more wonderful,  
Than a great people moving towards the deep,  
Of an unguessed and unfeared future.*

**Lawrence Binyon**, like John Freeman, thought of the glories of war and prayed to the Spirit of England in *The Fourth of August* :

*Enkindle this dear earth that bore us,*

*In the hour of peril purified.*

Binyon felt exalted at the thought :

*We step from days of our division,  
Into the grandeur of our fate.*

Hardy and Alice Meynell, Bridges and John Masefield were also moved to write about the war and its future prospects. But it was the young soldier poet **Rupert Brooke** (1887—1915) who gave expression to the fervent hopes of the people for the war in his sonnets particularly the *Soldier* which has been considered as a masterpiece of patriotic fervour. Before writing poems on the war, Rupert Brooke was interested in expressing disgust and dislike for artifices of the eighteen-nineties group of writers. He quickly reacted against the vitiated hot house atmosphere of the Decadents and “wallowed in ugliness in order to demonstrate his distaste for pretty poetry.” He represented ugly scenes marked with a note of blatant realism. Describing the state of the two passengers in a train, Brooke wrote—

*Opposite me two Germans sweat and snore  
One of them wakes, and spits and sleeps again.*

Brooke scoffed at the romantic view of heroes and heroines in *Menelans and Helen*, and drew the attention of his readers to the beauties of Nature and realities of life. In *The Old Vicarage Grantchester*, Brooke presented his love for Nature without any colour of mysticism and metaphysical subtlety. In *The Great Lover* he wrote of the hundred and one things of ordinary day to life, such as plates and cups, dust, wet roofs, wood-smoke, which provided him interest and joy.

When the war came in 1914, Brooke hailed it with enthusiasm. He wrote fine war sonnets exhibiting his enthusiasm and noble resolve to serve his country. He looked upon the war as a glorious adventure and welcomed the call to action with joy—

*Now, God be thanked who has matched us with this  
hour,*

*And caught our youth and wakened us from sleeping,  
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,  
To turn, and swimmers into cleanness leaping  
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary.*

In another poem he wrote—

*Honour has come back, as a king, to earth  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage:  
And nobleness walks in our ways again  
And we have come into our heritage.*

Rupert Brooke was killed in action on St. George's day 1915, and in popular imagination he was canonized. "It is natural, though unprofitable, to speculate as to what might have been Rupert Brooke's place in English poetry if he had lived on. The marks of greatness in his poems are few, but such marks there are. He saw the world with a clear eye and recorded what he saw with directness and clarity. Yet, however, poetic in himself, Rupert Brooke was more important as the occasion of poetry in others ; *though the war-time revival of English poetry, had its origin in Brooke alone.*"\*

The first phase of war-poetry mostly eulogising war and harping on the note of patriotic sacrifice for the nation passed away as soldiers, who had been to the war, returned to England to horrify people with their brutal war experiences. In the poetry of the soldier-poets who have personal experience of the war; we hear undertones of the ravages and horrors of war in terrifying words.

**Siegfried Sassoon (1886— )**

He was the first great soldier-poet who revealed the horrors and ugliness of war. He presented in his verse the ghastly and terrible realities of the trenches, and recounting his own experiences, admonished the people to stop war. He failed to convince the war lords of the futility of war and gradually became resigned and re-enlisted himself in the army. In Sassoon's war poetry we come across the horrors and ugliness of war in a blatant way. The poems in *Counter Attack* bring out the horrors of war in a terrifying manner. Here is one picture drawn by Sassoon :

*The place was rotten with dead, green clumsy legs  
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the caps  
And trunks face, downward in the sucking mud,  
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled,*

\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

*And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,  
Bulged clotted heads slept in the plastering slime*

"In general Sassoon's mood was to convey the bitter truth, to tear off mask from the ugly face of reality, and to wreak his anger on the heartless and the hypocrites."\* Only in one poem *Everyone Sang* there is the absence of horror and the brutality of war. 'This poem is perhaps, the only beautiful and clean bit of verse which the war produced.'

**Robert Graves (1895 ) \***

Graves was horrified by the ravages of the war and his inner personality recoiled from the beastiness and spiritual waste produced by the war. He thought more of the countryside and the beautiful world which lay outside the battlefield than of the actual war. "Purely as a war poet he did not attain to considerable stature."

**Robert Nicholas (1893— )**

Nicholas is a rhetorician and a spendthrift of genius scattering his verses with a lavish hand. His war poems are wordy rather than substantial. But at places there is vigour and directness, which, in spite of its bluntness, seems quite refreshing. Here are a few lines—

*Revolver levelled quick  
Flick : Flick ;  
Red as blood.  
Germans, Germans.  
Good, O Good ;  
Cool, Madness.*

**Wilfred Owen (1893—1918).**

Owen was inspired by Sassoon to write war poems in his *Collected Poems*. In the Preface to this collection he wrote—"I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is war, and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity." In the war poems of Owen the pity of war is poignantly and touchingly presented. "Never has the pity of war" says Albert, "been more deeply felt or more powerfully shown. Though his satire is often sharp, he never loses his artistic poise, and his most bitter work has a

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

dignity which is truly great. "In his popular poem *Strange Meeting* the pity of war is brought out touchingly. Two soldiers belonging to opposite sides meet after death and they both deplore the barbarism and tragic waste of war fare.

Owen had a good command of rhythm and was a ceaseless experimenter in verse techniques. He introduced para-rhyme and prepared the way for subsequent poets to follow the innovations in rhyming

**Julian Grenfell (1888—1915).**

Grenfell was a soldier on active service in France, but instead of dealing with the horrors of war, he chose to write of tranquillity in the midst of turmoil and confusion. This serene mood of the poet is reflected in *Into Battle*. His poetry presents "a calm communion with unwarlike things. In the midst of fire he could withdraw into himself and find solace, harmony, and fellowship with earth and trees and the grass, with stars and birds and horses"\*

Grenfell preserved his spiritual certitude and moral courage in the midst of warfare and his greatness lies in keeping aloft the tone of nobility and spirituality in the midst of war.

**Edmund Blunden (1896— )**

Blunden, the poet of nature and pastoralism, was deeply agonised by the horrors of war and expressed his resentment in his book *Undertones of War*. His war poems have less pungency than those of either Owen or Sassoon. He could not present the ugly experiences of war with the same vigour and lore as his compeers.

Among the Georgian poets who wrote about war, reference to J. C. Squire's *To A Bulldog*, Maurice Baring's *To The Memory of Lord Lucas* and A. E. Housman's *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries* is necessary. These poets were non combatants but they could produce elegiac verses on the war and succeeded in bringing out the weariness and madness of trench-fighting and the life of the soldiers on the battlefield.

\* A. C. Ward—*Twentieth Century Literature*.



**Q. 130.** Give a brief account of English poetry between (1920—30) and critically examine the works and the contribution of the prominent younger poets of this period.

OR

“It would be hard to dispute that in this decade (1920—1930) the poets who led the vanguard of poetry were T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell.” Examine this statement critically.

**Ans.** English poetry between (1920—1930) presents the fine spectacle of old traditional poets moving steadily by the side of the younger poets. Tradition and experiment go hand in hand during this period. “To those who lived in the twenties, however, the poetic stage appeared far more crowded, and merely to enumerate some of the other principal poets shows how various were the kinds of poetry written and admired.” The old poets who were keeping to the wearied and well trodden path of traditional poetry were Hardy, Bridges, Davies, Walter De La Mare, A. E. Housman, Gibson, Masfield and Bottomley. Though *Georgian Poetry* ceased to appear after 1922, others of its poets, such as Drinkwater, Shanks, W. J. Turner and their leader J. C. Squire were still holding the stage. Alfred Noyes was adding to his songs and ballads the epical history of science in *The Torch Bearers*.

The new poets who had not yet opened their account in the field of literature were gradually gaining prominence, and among the new adventurers in the realm of poetry were T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, Richard Church, Herbert Palmer, and Victoria Sackville-West. Humbert Wolfe and Roy Campbell were other prominent figures among the young generation of new poets. And then at the end of the decade there appeared the new constellation of Auden, Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Mac Neice.

The two great personalities of this decade are undoubtedly T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, and these two poets revolutionised the whole concept of poetry by their startling innovations in matter and new experiments in metre, diction and rhyme. They deserve special study in this brief review.

**T. S. Eliot**

T. S. Eliot an American by birth became a naturalised British subject in 1927, and his contribution to English poetry, drama, and criticism has been substantial and solid. Eliot is a difficult poet to understand and his poetry, loaded with the weight of his stupendous learning and subtle allusiveness, baffles an average well informed reader. T. S. Eliot took the profession of poetry seriously and deliberately set out to make his poetic production as hard and rugged as a granite rock. For him poetry is not 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions' but a difficult art to follow without proper intellectual equipment in the reader. The odour of bookishness is everywhere in Eliot's poetry. He conceived that a new poet must be, "difficult, more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect in order to force to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." To make himself inaccessible to popular comprehension Eliot introduced strange symbols and images in his poetry. "He extended the scope of symbolism to include the use of partial quotation and of allusion to create the thought or atmosphere, contrast or illumination, he desired. With the elusive hint of ten from the depths of learning he rivalled the later masters of the crossword puzzle, which was another product of the new mental climate." He made poetry complex and confusing by calling back to his mind the images and phrases, thoughts and ideas of a thousand authors whose work he had pillaged and by introducing them without harmony and order in the tangled skein of his poetic thought. His obsession with the problem of time, and his strong desire to realise a vision, both earthly and spiritual, further accentuated the mystifying atmosphere of his poetry. The result has been on the whole unfavourable for the poet, and inspite of the best attempts of critics and annotators to shed light on Eliot's poetry, he remains an obscure and recondite poet.

**Formative Influences on T. S. Eliot.**

T. S. Eliot was considerably influenced by a number of writers European and Oriental, and by a variety of movements in the world of poetry. He owed a great deal to the French Symbolist poets, who in their turn were influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, whose *ulalume* has been considered the first great poem

of the symbolist school. The poets of the symbolic school regarded poetry as "consisting in the musical evocation of moods, vague, subtle and evanescent. To this end they concentrated on the suggestive power of word music and on suggestion by means of association of ideas." It was Arthur Symonds who familiarised English poetry with the work of the French Symbolists in his book *The Symbolist Movement of Literature*. Eliot studied this book, and became familiar with the work of the French Symbolists like Laforgue, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Tristan and Cobiere. He sought to imitate their method and manner, their tone and metre in his poetry.

Donne and the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century also exercised a deep influence on T. S. Eliot. "Donne gave him examples of the complex and subtle mood poem, at once intellectual, emotional and physical in its appeal; of striking imagery and unexpected turns; of rapid transition from image to image and idea to idea by emotional rather than logical sequence; of the alliance of levity and seriousness."\* "His major English progenitor was the seventeenth century poet Donne, from whom he learned to present antithetical moods in a single poem, the cultivation of metaphysical conceits, and the use upon occasion of colloquial rather than literary diction."\*\* "Eliot it was who was chiefly instrumental in leading poets back to Donne, and as an imitator, but as bringing a Donne-like mind and spiritual apprehension to bear upon the contemporary world, and re-establishing the 'conceits' of the metaphysicals in modern dress. But whereas Donne's imagination was invariably passionate and consuming, Eliot's was often anaemic and chill."†

Webster and Tournour gave Eliot 'the union of thought and passion, in its dramatic speech rhythm.' Dante, the great Italian poet, exercised a profound influence on Eliot. He had a reverence for Dante's grand simplicity and the profundity of his genius. Baudelaire's influence on Eliot's imagery can plainly be seen. Eliot paid tribute to Baudelaire for giving "new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of imagery of contemporary life." The

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.

\*\* Moody & Lovett : A History of English Literature.

† A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

Imagists, too, made their contribution in the formation of his style, for he "combined their precise little pictures with the vaguer imagery of the Symbolists."—These influences worked on T. S. Eliot's mind and made his poetry 'a combination of as many strands of tradition as possible.'

#### The Main Poetical Works of T. S. Eliot.

The first great work of T. S. Eliot was *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. This poem created a stir in the poetical world of the twenties. Here we clearly notice the influence of Laforgue, the French symbolist, in the somewhat self-consciously depressed tone of the poem. Eliot presents here "the nervous tension and suppressed hysteria of this world of frustrated, rudderless, cultured, well-to-do people" in a style that at once catches the reader. J. Alfred Prufrock is a middle aged dilettante. He is feeling the weight of years. He calls back to his mind his suppressed yearnings and romantic memories. He is the victim of indecision. He cannot fulfil his desires and so he laughs ruefully at himself. There is the woman in *Portrait of Lady*, but Prufrock cannot fulfil himself. Through Prufrock the poet seeks to portray the emptiness, sordiness and ugliness of modern life. "The irregularities of rhyme scheme and line length in his verse form, the pressure of his condensed and often vividly contrasted images, the skilful use of rhythmic variations and the restrained power of his style distinguished Eliot as a gifted, original artist" in this poem.

The *Poems* (1920) exhibit the same mood. The verse form is completely changed. Instead of the irregular verse paragraph we have four-line stanza rhyming *abcb*. The difficult monologue *Gerontion* is couched in the blank verse of the later Elizabethan dramatists.

The much discussed *Waste Land* appeared in 1922. Here as in the early works, Eliot attempted, "to create 'a sense of the sordidness and vulgarity, the moral debility and spiritual desiccation of modern life.'" Here we find the same atmosphere of disillusionment about modern life as in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*. Here is compressed "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" "Partly through his own emotions, partly through those of typical figures

he aimed at creating, not an objective description, but a dramatic self expression of an age of emotional sterility devoid of real purpose and haunted by fear." The symbolism of *Waste Land* is drawn from the legend of the Holy Grail of a Waste Land, stricken by drought, where everything has become sterile. Based upon that myth Eliot presents London as a Waste Land. To understand the poem one has to read two works, Miss Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and two volumes of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The poem is built round the symbols of drought and flood, representing death and rebirth. In a series of disconcertingly vivid impressions, the poem advances by rather abrupt transitions through five movements—'The Burial of the Dead', 'The Game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water', 'What the Thunder Said.' The figure of Tiresias provides emotional unity to the poem. The defect of the poem lies in the fact that it "concentrates on the cosmopolitan city dwellers on Suburbia, and the intellegentsia, and ignores both the life abundant which upheld them, and the vitality, destructive but strong of his Sweeney type."

In 1925 appeared *The Hollow Men* representing the dying embers of dying civilization. Here are presented—

*Stuffed men*

*Leaning together,*

*Headpiece filled with straw.*

After 1925 the direction of Eliot's poetry changed. He turned away from satire and criticism 'to a constructive search for the truth.' In *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) he directed his gaze to religion and spiritual life. He finds hope in the discipline of the Christian religion. The poem records "in six movements a spiritual experience beginning with renunciation and ending with the hope of life renewed." "The six movements alternate between the sombre and the hopeful. Much of the imagery and the concentrated expression makes the intellectual understanding of the poem very difficult but the colour and life in the imagery and the very sound and rhythm of the lines convey the spiritual movement to the reader."\* The new spiritual change that came over Eliot at this time is reflected in *Journey of the Magi* commemorating the

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

birth of Christ. *Mariana* further marks the emergence of Eliot from *Waste Land* into the land of Beulah with a better hope for mankind. The resurrection of Eliot's faith is best represented in *Four Quartets* appearing separately under *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), *Little Gidding* (1942). In these religious poems we "become aware of the intensity of Eliot's search for religious truth, which leads finally to a new hope in the Christian idea of rebirth and renewal". In these *Four Quartets* Eliot seeks to solve for himself the problem he had posed at the end of *The Waste Land*—how 'to set my lands in order'. The *Four Quartets* are great philosophical odes. They are highly complex in their thought and imagery. It is not an overstatement when Dr. Collins says that "books are necessary for their full expounding". These poems are for learned scholars and not for the average reader.

#### Estimate of T. S. Eliot as a poet.

T. S. Eliot is a difficult poet and it is not an easy game to understand the complexity of his thoughts and the subtlety of his expression. The amalgam of various stands in his poetry makes him a hard nut to crack. In his earlier poetry the difficulty mainly rises due to the technique he adopted for the expression of his thoughts. A condensed and often oblique expression in which necessary links are frequently omitted makes him obscure and ambiguous. In the *Waste Land* he is extremely allusive and deliberately vague in the use of symbols and images. The difficulty of the later poems rises due to the nature of the subjects—"states of mind and experiences incapable of precise formulation and therefore difficult to communicate". The *Four Quartets* are highly complex philosophical odes needing much illumination and explanation for their understanding. The major theme of these philosophical poems is "the antithesis between time and the timeless, between time and eternity, and the series of poems rises to its climax in a consideration of the incarnation, the point of intersection of time and eternity."

Eliot's poetry is a kind of spiritual experience a struggle of the soul to pass through the seething strife and turmoil of the *Waste Land* to the hope and faith of *Ash Wednesday* and the *Four Quartets*. His poetry represents the gradual evolution and progress

of his soul through the suffering of "(a) the perception of evil, folly and futility expressed in the *Prufrock* and *Gerontion* (b) the almost hopeless search for spiritual rebirth in the experience of the Wastelands of past and present (c) the ascent of the hill of Purgatory and the vision of the Inferno in *Ash-Wednesday* and *The Hollow Men*. The final summing and full sense of spiritual release is achieved in the *Four Quartets*."

Eliot's poetry while seeking to appeal to emotions is of an intellectual character. It is written with deliberation and is not the result of spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It is loaded with learning and is heavy with thought. The thinker in Eliot overpowers the artist and the poet, and the stamp of a highly subtle and intellectual personality is on every line of the poet. The odour of bookishness is everywhere in Eliot's poetry.

Eliot is not a poet of the first order. David Daiches characterised him in his Delhi Seminar address as "the great minor poet of the 20th century." But to call him a minor poet will not be just. He would be remembered as one of the greatest renovators of English poetry. "He has given it a new intellectual dignity, new forms arising out of a new sincerity and a new spiritual depth. Like Dryden after the Restoration and Wordsworth at the end of the eighteenth century he has also given it a new policy. More than any other poet he has saved it from becoming a mere past time of the scholarly section of the upper middle class, like Latin poetry in the days of Claudian and Ausonius."\*

**Edith Sitwell (1887 - )**

Edith Sitwell was born in a family, "in which arts were a living heritage and beauty of every kind was an open book." She played an important part in leading the reaction against Georgian poetry. She was mainly responsible for making traditional Georgian poetry outmoded. Between 1906 and 1911 she laid the foundation of *Wheels* in opposition to Georgian poetry, and contributed her poems to this new organ. The sixth cycle of wheels contains a direct attack on J. C. Squire and his friends.

The early poetry of Edith Sitwell *Glown's Houses* (1918), *The*

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\* V. D. S. Pinto : Crisis in Modern Poetry.

*Wooden Pegasus* (1920), *Bucolic Comedies* (1923) are in the style of T. S. Eliot and they are mainly concerned with the futility of modern life. "His early poems showed her painfully aware of the artificiality of contemporary life and oppressed by the dust of mortality." She represented the tragedy of human life and the sordidness of modern materialism. *Dust* and the *dry bone* come again and again in her imagery.

The early poems of Edith Sitwell mark her out as an escapist to the world of art and the joys of childhood. Auden later on found hope from modern materialism into politics, Edith Sitwell in the world of childhood and art. She was essentially an artist. "Whether in life or art, she was born above all else with the soul of an artist bound to strike out as a rebel in pursuit of her ideals." Her brother Osbert made the following observation about Sitwell—

*Ascetic artist of the painting word,  
Your whole life bent to this one, selfless cause,  
Of netting beauty with a phrase or pause.*

Poetic artistry saved her from the materialism of the age.

In these early poems of Edith Sitwell we are impressed by her style and her vivid imagery. The most distinctive and notable feature of her style in these early years was her use of sense impressions. She could successfully impart to one sense the attributes of another as had been done by Milton in 'Blind mouths' in *Lycidas*. We find Edith using such sense impressions as 'crackling green,' 'braying light', 'Jangling rain'. He shares her 'acute and uncovered senses.' In a single word or brief phrase she successfully achieves a striking effect, and the vividness of her imagery and her love of rich colour contribute much to the charm of her work.

In the later poems of Edith Sitwell we feel a sense of beauty and human heartedness. Her long poem *The Sleeping Beauty*, "is a rare continuity of beauty, highly wrought, glowing with colour and dazzling with imagery, a beauty existing equally in the control and harmony of sound, to which she always gave the most exacting and sensitive craftsmanship."\*

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins—English Literature of the 20th Century.



The human heartedness of her poetry can also be felt in her later poems such as *Rustic Elegies* (1927). "Her earlier poetry had been aloof, aristocratic, and, a little inhuman, her later poetry was compassionate, committed and, in the best sense, tragic. The suffering and destruction wrought by the war, the revelation of the evil of which man was capable not only aroused in her the deepest feelings of horror and compassion but moved her to create in a style appropriate to the expression of great themes and powerful emotions."\* Her human heartedness comes out especially in *Four Elegies* and *Aubade*.

Miss Edith Sitwell has been considerably influenced by the Second World War and her memorable war poems are *Song of the Cold* (1945) and *The Canticle of the Sun* (1949).

"Later Edith Sitwell developed into one of the major religious and metaphysical poets of the period, under the stressful and sobering influences of the troubled nineteen thirties and the ensuing Second World War. *The Song of the Cold* (1945) though containing mainly poems written from 1939 onward, also includes a number of pieces from her early and middle period, and shows her progress from the fantastical to the spiritual—a progress which, in the light of her poetry as a whole, can be seen as orderly and inevitable."†

Osbert Sitwell (1897— ) and Sacheverell Sitwell (1897— )

The two brothers of Edith Sitwell are poets of name, but they could not achieve the excellence of Edith Sitwell. Osbert Sitwell was primarily a satirist, and he flashed the sword of his wit at the old and stupid conventions of the society of his times. "He flayed with shining whips the money-making philistines." In *Green Fly* he attacked the silly sentimentalism of those who could cry over a hurt dog when millions met their death in agony on the battle field. His scorn for the anaemic and spineless people, who were scared of reality and were insulated by money and convention was expressed in *Church Parade*. He remained a bitter critic and satirist of his times. He remained a lover of the old world and a master of the clarity of expression in his writings.

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\* Moody Lovett—A History of English Literature.

† A. C. Ward—Twentieth Century Literature.

He also produced some successful poems in the impressionistic style. The following lines from *Giardino Publico* exhibit the varying sensations of heat, coolness and silence—

*Petunias in mass formation  
An angry rose, a hard carnation  
Hot yellow grass, a yellow palm  
Rising, giraffe—like, into calm,  
All these glare hotly into the sun.  
Behind are woods where shadows run  
Like water through the dripping shade  
That leaves and laughing winds have made  
Here silence like a silver bird  
Pecks at the droning heat.*

Sacheverell Sitwell was an artist and he "rivalled his sister in devotion to the artistry of poetry, sharing her passionate love of beauty and her eagerness to experiment." He wrote poems in the lyrical strain about fishermen and ordinary toilers in the field. His 'clear lyrical pictures of ordinary life' are impressive. *One Hundred and One Harlequins* in 1922 breaks a new ground. Here Sacheverell is a critic of his times. The work is lit up with wit and fantasy and brings the contemporary world in its true colours. Sitwell's *Dr. Donne and Gargantua* strikes another note, the note of symbolism. It portrays, "a contest between good and evil, between the spiritual and the physical."

#### **Victoria Sackville West.**

In Victoria Sackville West we find a love for nature and pastoral life. Her poem *The Land* (1926) is saturated with the spirit of Virgil's *Eclogues* and is a fine picture of the shepherds and yeoman, the toilers and workers in the English field. She at once calls back to our mind Dyer's *Fleece* and Wordsworth's nature poetry. "Her interspersed lyrics especially have the purity and clarity of timeless song."

#### **Richard Church.**

Richard Church worked for 'honest, unpretentious poetry, during the twenties. His poems are about ordinary things and ordinary people. He has nicely captured everyday scenes and moods in his *Mood Without Measures* (1928) and he has proved that poetry could still live by the 'simplest sincerity and lucid

artistry.' His poems are about catching a bus or a railway train. He presents—

*The joy that never fails*

*The silent speech with vast creation's God.*

**Herbert Read.**

Herbert Read "in a terse intellectual poetry of austere beauty retaining much of his earliest Imagist style, wrote both satire and metaphysics. He too had come from the war intent to unravel the twisted years and the twisted white ecstasy of intellect."

**Humbert Wolfe.**

He was a satirist and in *New of the Devil* (1926) he satirised newspapers with vehemence. He described an encounter between the Devil and a multiple newspaper proprietor. In *Requiem* (1927) he presented the lives of men and women who fail and succeed in life. He sought "to reach a reconciling vision in which sinners and saints rest in God's sight. He gave to his theme deep feeling, and much beauty, and no volume of poems in this decade had a deeper religious attitude to life.

**Roy Campbell.**

He was a south African and he excelled in narrative poetry. His long narrative poem *The Flying Terrapin* appeared in 1924, and the work caught popular attention. It is a poem of sea life and deals with the Terrapin, a sea monster, who stands as a symbol of elemental energy of life. Campbell exhibits himself a romanticist in this poem. In his *Wayzgoose* he satirised the commercial and cultural behaviour of the white people towards Africans. His *Adamaster* (1930) brings him out as a lover of nature in its violent moods. He is the worshipper of strength and violence and in his nature poems we have the fierce intensity of Byron. He admired Nature in her fierce and callous moods.

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**Q. 131.** Write a note on the poetic trends between (1930—1940) and evaluate the work of the prominent poets of this period.

**Ans.** Poetry between (1930—40) was dominated by a set of poets—Auden, Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice\* who made poetry a matter of revolutionary and dynamic thinking rather than allowing it dalliance with pastoral beauties. Poetry until recently had been interested in pastoral life and traditional heroic ages, but “the material utilized by the characteristic poets of the nineteen-thirties differs as much from the familiar material of the pastoral ages as duralumin differs from gold.”\*\*The poets of this period were intensely interested in modern life, and were bent upon harnessing all phases of modern life and knowledge in their works. They were interested in politics and were communistic in their outlook. Many of the groups adopted communism as their faith. It was rarely in poetry that so open a reference to politics was made as during this decade. Michael Roberts in his *New Country* selection emphasised their political tendency, and their leanings for the teaching of Karl Marx. They failed to realise the dangers of ‘political partisanship. “That in the long run their preoccupation with contemporary life in its political aspects was bound to limit their effectiveness as poets they did not realise until this decade was ended.” Unmindful of their future in the realm of poetry they went on preaching revolutionary communistic views for the regeneration of the decadent society of their times. “They were all acutely aware of the deficiencies of the order that has created the world in which they must live or die; they abominate bourgeois society, with its repressions, creative comforts, and materialism, they felt that nothing short of a revolution will bring about a new order, basically communistic, in which living will be decent and self-respecting.”†

The poets of this school were considerably influenced in their technique by Imagist poets, Symbolists of France, and the

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\* The work of these poets is to be found in “New Signatures (1932)” and “The Fabre Book of 20th Century Verse (1950)”.

\*\* A. C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature.

† Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

innovations of Hopkins and T. S. Eliot. "The 'New Country' poets used slang, jazzy metres and imagery derived from machinery and boys' stories but their technique of expression was the symbolist idiom learnt from Eliot, which was quite incomprehensible to the low brow." They employed a language which could not be easily followed by the ordinary reader. "Their poetry often gives the impression of being written in a sort of private family language and of being addressed rather self-consciously and exclusively to the initiated." The poets of this school wanted poetry to speak in a new language and new rhythm. They made it more intellectual than emotional. But with all their shortcomings they brought into poetry a new virility and a new sense of the contemporary situation in England. By their revolutionary and dynamic poetic creed, they took out poetry from the anaemic state into which it had fallen during the Georgian period.

The poets of this school had common ideas and used common idiom, but they lacked homogeneity. Before the Second World War the group rapidly disintegrated. "Rather, it was seen never to have been a real group at all, but only a number of poets of about the same age and the kind of educational background, with varying degrees of talent and very different poetic personalities."

W. H. Auden (1907— )

Auden settled in the United States after the beginning of the Second World War and "has since become a part of the American literary scene as T. S. Eliot has of the English." Before migrating to U. S. A., Auden wrote poetry concerning with British life of his days and concentrated on the "hollowness of the disintegrating post-war civilization," as can be seen in the following lines :—

*Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud  
own.*

*Though the roads have almost vanished and the express  
never run.*

*Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rattling warves and  
choked canals.*

*Framelines buckled, smashed, trucks lying on their side  
across the rails.*

He studied the life of the common men and the social problems confronting him in the post-war world. He was disgusted with anaemic social order and advocated violent social reforms for bringing about a change in society. He worked for a revolution on communistic lines for the regeneration of the down-trodden and miserable masses. Auden shows clearly in his early poetry a faith in violent social revolution as a means of ushering in a better social order. He was all for the 'proletariat', and his sympathies were for the 'unloved' and the 'unlucky'. His poetry became extremely class conscious and was dominated by the Marxian view of society. He worked, 'above all for the creation of a society in which the real and the living contact between man and man, may again become possible'.

Auden soon came under the influence of Freud and his psychological approach to the problems of human life. He was also influenced by the teaching of Homer Lane. He laid emphasis on "change of heart" for the betterment of the common people. He wanted better understanding among the highbrows rather than a sentimental sympathy for the sick. For Auden pity was a sterile and evil thing. A real change of heart was needed for the settlement of human life.

A few poems of Auden are also mystical and metaphysical in character and are coloured by the thoughts of T. S. Eliot and the psychologists of the age. In some poems the note of satire against modern civilization is apparent. There is a search for the overt and covert enemies.

As an artist and experimentator, Auden showed intellectual curiosity and picked up ideas, facts and suggestions from several quarters. He was influenced in his technique by Eliot, Owen, Hopkins and the French symbolists. "From Eliot came the symbolic method, the use of modern imagery and of abstract expression; from Owen the use of assonance, and internal rhyme; from Hopkins "Sprung Rhythm", and from both Eliot and Hopkins the example of severe condensation, at whatever pains to the reader."\*

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

"Technically Auden is an artist of great virtuosity, a ceaseless experimenter in verse form, with a fine ear for the rhythm and music of words. Essentially modern in tone, he has a wide variety—often he writes with a noisy jazziness and gaiety, often in a cynically satirical vein, and on no occasion he can be slangily 'tough.' But usually he shows a delight in elliptical thought and close packed imagery, and, if, his proletarianism has sometimes led him into flaws of taste, it has also led him to exploit more fully than any one of his predecessors the riches and vigour of everyday idiom and vocabulary."\*

**Christopher Isherwood (1904— )**

The poetry of Isherwood who worked together with Auden in the composition of poetical plays, is to be found in *Poems* (1930), *The Orators* (1932), *Look Stranger* (1936), *Another Time* (1940), *New Year Letter* (1941), *For The Time Being* (1945), *The Age of Anxiety* (1948), *Collected Shorter Poems* (1932-1944). He has presented the social problems of his times in a beautiful manner.

**Stephen Spender (1909— )**

The poetry of Stephen Spender is to be found in *Poems* (1933-1938), *Vienna* (1934), *The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Visions* (1942), *Poems of Dedication* (1946), *The Edge of Being* (1949), *World Within a World* (1951).

Stephen Spender, like Auden, was interested in leftist political views and he pinned his hopes for the future on left-wing political theories. *Poems* (1933), clearly indicated the same Marxist attitude at that of Auden and Day Lewis. In the poems of this volume we have the vision of a future world in which death, despair and decay are to be completely ousted from our midst. The old world "where shapes of death haunt human life" must go and the young comrades must "advance to rebuild.....advance to rebel," giving up "dreams.....of heaven after our world." They must be governed and dominated by "the palpable and obvious love of man for man." They must work for a world in which no one would die of hunger and "Man shall be man."

Spender laid great emphasis on the individual. He "always

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\* E. Albert : A History of English Literature.

stressed, in even the most political of his poems, the import of social revolution for the individual and his values."\* He faced and posed the problems of the highly imaginative and sensitive individual to the tensions and uprisings of his times. His main forte lay in the exploration of the individual consciousness.

His poetry is introspective in character, and in his later poetry there is a tendency in the poet to look more within himself for his subjects. His lyrics give expression to his views about war and the problems of the individual in human society. His lyrics, unlike that of Auden, make an appeal of the heart rather than to the intellect.

Spender lays stress on the body and is not prepared to sacrifice the claims of the body at any cost. In his opinion the value of life lies as much in the body as in the fiery soul. There must not be only "the following of the spirit" but "The essential delight to the blood drawn from ageless springs".

The lover of the body and the senses, Spender, introduced sensuous imagery in his poetry. He could invest even pylons with physical appearance, seeing them "like rude, giant girls".

Spender was equally interested in writing about the war. He expressed like Wilfred Owen the pity of war in his poems. "Pity seems almost an element of Spender's sensuousness, a constant current in his poetry". Some of his poems deal with the Spanish Civil War and the poem *Two Armies* expresses the pity of war.

Spender is "an artist of fine sensibilities and considerable technical accomplishment," and his work is widely admired for his lyricism, sensuous imagery, psychological penetration, introspective insight, and championship of the individual in the future world.

Cecil Day Lewis (1904— )

"Cecil Day Lewis gives perhaps the clearest expression to the revolutionary doctrines shared by a number of his poetic friends—Auden and Spender". In the early poetry of Day Lewis, the influence of Auden is clearly perceptible. It appears that the poet is aping the style of Auden in lines like the following—

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.



*Make no mistake, this is where you get off  
Sue with her suckling, Cyril with his cough,  
But with a blazer and a safety razor.*

Day Lewis in spite of his imitation of Auden "was a more human poet, in spite of Auden's insistence of love and his praise of spontaneous living". In his poetry we do not come across a high search for knowledge. He does not exhibit "the same restless intellect and acquisitiveness of knowledge as Auden's". Day Lewis is essentially the poet of nature, and his love for nature is clearly brought out in his lyrics and Georgics. The deep love of England is reflected in his poems in a more impressive manner than in the poems of Auden. "Day Lewis was an open-air poet, above all a poet of the wind and of bird-song of everything that shared and inspired his own nervous vitality".\*

Let us now briefly examine the poetical works of the poet. *Transitional Poems* (1929), a long cycle of short poems, is connected with the poet's own life. Here we come across, "personal experience in the pursuit of single mindedness". In the poems of this volume "he rejected the conventional technique of his earlier volumes and strove to define his relationship to the social and political problems that confronted his generation". *The Magnetic Mountain* (1935) "is his fullest attack upon the shortcomings and the weaknesses of the old order and his clear call to revolutionary activity that will bring in the new order of things. The basic imagery of the poem—the train journey of which the inevitable destination is the magnetic mountain of the new society—is powerfully used, and the poem has brilliant satirical passages in which the adherents of things as they are mercilessly expose themselves" *From Feathers to Iron* (1931) presents Lewis's personal impressions of life and is penned in a clear cut style. In this poem the poet expresses his thoughts about the child to be born in a few days. He wishes that his child should be born in a world of beauty and should escape the boredom of modern mechanised life. He should be reared in the country surroundings far away from the hectic life of the city. *A Time for Dance* (1935) shows a rapid advance in the poetic style and thought of Lewis. The most signifi-

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\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

sent poem of this volume is a narrative poem describing the epical flight to Australia in cock of a plane, giving ample evidence, like *Nabara* of a year or so later, of the qualities and gifts of a narrative poet. *Overtures to Death* (1938) is clouded by the shadow of war and is a story of Spanish Civil War. "The symbolic significance of the little *Overtures to Death* suggests that his earlier revolutionary idealism had been overshadowed by his deepening consciousness of the rising threat of a terrific conflict between the major modern political ideologies". Since the beginning of the 1939—45 war the mood of Day Lewis became sober, and he made considerable improvement in his technical skill. He brought out two fine collections *World Over All* (1943) and *Poems* (1943—47) consisting largely of personal lyrics. In these poems Lewis exhibits technical excellence possibly acquired by his excellent verse translation of *The Georgics of Virgil* (1940).

Among the prose works of Lewis *A Hope for Poetry* (1934), *Poetry For You* (1945), *The Poetic Image* (1947) are worth study for understanding the poetic trends of the thirties.

Louis Macneice (1907— ).

Louis Macneice, the classical scholar, is a poet of repute and belongs to the Auden group though he has not whole heartedly supported and embraced the communistic creed. In his opinion communism might give the picture of perfection and a perfect society but the perfection would be maintained "for one day only". Macneice was dissatisfied with present day life, and turned his gaze to the old classical world. He feels frustrated and baffled in the world of to-day overridden by the forces of materialism and so he satirises the evils running rampant in our society, and to find refuge from the world of machinery and factory towns in the world of nature and country life. He is opposed to the inroads of politicians on the personal freedom of the individual and his poems give expression to his broad human compassion and his protest against modern political threats to personal liberty. Macneice is dissatisfied with present day politics and "his poems express a vigorous reaction to a world which only imperfectly administers to his needs and desires". He was an

idealist who realised that ideals cannot be completely achieved, but who still held to his ideals, which were those of the humanist, longing for a decent possibility of spontaneous living in a world of unassertive individuals".\*

Macneice is gifted with wit and is mostly in high spirits in his poetry. It is his witty and humorous way of telling things that take away the sting out of his poems revelling in horrors of the war.

"A purer artist than Auden, Macneice is actually aware of the musical potentialities of language, and he writes with a control, finish, lightness of touch, and a structural sense which are often lacking among the members of his group, though, on occasion, he will, for effect, fall into a looser manner". Macneice has written fine lyrics as well as poems of didacticism, but there is the lack of a driving force in his didactic poetry. "Even in his lyrics a veneer of casualness too often conceals the underlying emotions".

Macneice has done some good work in the field of poetic drama for broadcasting and his *The Dark Tower* (1946) gained wide popularity. His critical study *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* is a nice work on the Irish poet and dramatist.

Macneice's poetry can be found in *Poems* (1935), *The Earth Compels* (1938), *Autumn Journal* (1939), *Plant and Phantom* (1941), *Spring Board* (1944), *Hoies in the Sky* (1948), and *Collected Poems* (1949).

**Q. 132.** Clearly bring out the main trends in English poetry from 1940 to 1966 and write a note on the prominent poets of this period.

**Ans.** During (1940—1966) many new experiments have been made in English poetry. One significant feature of the poetry of this period is the absence of political consciousness among the poets of this age. Stephen in *Life and the Poet* had pleaded for the emergence of poetry from the field of politics into the pure air of art and nature. He had declared that poetry must return to the

\* A. S. Collins : *English Literature of the 20th Century*.

fundamental things of life and must cut off its political moorings. Poetry of this period is generally free from left-wing political leanings. The political poetry of the thirties passed away during 1940—60. In place of politics, romanticism and religion came into prominence, and the Second World War also influenced the poets of the age.

#### **The Apocalyptic Movement.**

The only considerable poetic "movement" of the forties was the Apocalyptic Movement. It came into prominence at the beginning of the Second World War. Its main leaders were J. F. Hendry and Henry Treece and they edited their Apocalyptic anthology *The White Horseman*. In 1946 Henry Treece brought out the manifesto of the new movement in *How I See Apocalypse*. The study of this book clearly reveals the aims and objectives of the new movement. Politically the movement was opposed to left-wing political theories and stood opposed to the propagation of political poetry by Auden and his groups. The political position of the movement was declared to be, "clearly Anarchic, an antidote to left-wing Audenism as much as to right-wing Squirearchy." The movement took in its fold both worlds "that of objects and that of dreams." The leaders of the movement G. S. Fraser and Tom Scott besides J. F. Henry and Henry Treece were considerably influenced by the Book of Revelation, Blake, Shakespeare, Donne, Hopkins and Webster. The movement was based on an assertion of the individual worth, and an expression of the individual perspective of the world. "Apocalyptic writing, then is the art form of the man who can recognise, without fear, the variety and multiplicity of life ; of the man who acknowledges his dreams and his laughter, and the tiny and almost unmentionable things of life, as being real and desirable for sanity's sake. And the Apocalyptic attitude will teach poetry to be broad, deep, limitless, like true life. It will teach men to live more, and to exist less." The movement proclaimed its hatred of machinery and a faith in individual vision of the world. The movement set its face against over-intellectual poetry of the thirties, but many of its members, and notably Fraser, were dominated by intellectuality in their work. The movement did not work

well and was soon given up when the war came with its thundering and rumbling tone.

#### Religious Movement:

Religion received a spurt during this period and there was a revival of religious poetry in the work of Kathleen Raine, Christopher Hassall, Norman Nicholson and David Gascoyne, Dylan, Thomas and Charles Williams a humanist teacher at Oxford. Among these poets Dylan Thomas deserves special consideration, for he among the poets of the last two decades made a vital and substantial contribution to English poetry:

#### Dylan Thomas (1914—53).

Dylan Thomas has been recognised as the father of the neo-romantic poetry of the forties and the leader of the movement striking against over-intellectuality in poetry. He wrote strongly emotional poetry full of fervour and vigour. His poetry abounds in vital energy and is vividly colourful and musical. "The depth and intensity of his passion, his verbal gift, the technical skill which underlies his metrical experiments all suggest that Dylan Thomas has the makings of a great poet."

Dylan Thomas was at heart a religious man. His vision of life was fundamentally religious, and his faith burnt clearly and brightly in *Death and Entrances*. His poetry indeed 'conquered Death in War time and opened Entrances to a fuller life.' Dylan Thomas believed in immortality and perpetual life in cosmic eternity. He had the religious faith of a mystic who viewed the whole universe in a cosmic unity. It was his mission in poetry "to embrace the unity of man with nature, of the generations which each other, of the divine with the human, of life with death, to see the glory and wonder of it." Death could not terrify him—

*And death shall have no dominion  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again  
Though lovers be lost love shall not,  
And death shall have no dominion.*

It is this thought that strikes the note of triumph in *Ceremony after a Fire Raid* and *A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire, of a Child in London*. One dies but once and through that becomes reunited with the timeless unity of things. Then where is the necessity of mourning. The nature poems of Dylan Thomas are equally delightful and impressive. In poems *Poem in October* and *Fern Hill* we find the poet feeling happy like a child in the lap of Nature. In these poems 'a passionate love of nature linked to childhood memories, produced a beauty that touches the heart and stirs the senses.'

The poems of Dylan Thomas are too closely packed with metaphor and symbolic poetic imagery. If we fail to grasp his symbolism, we lose much charm of his verse. A fair number of Thomas's earlier poems are obscure because of their metaphor, symbolism and imagery. His attempt to push into the service of his muse every Biblical, Freudian or folk image, makes him obscure and difficult of comprehension.

His poetry has appeared in magazines and anthologies. His main works are. *18 Poems* (1934), *25 Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1938), *Verse and Prose* (1939), *Deaths and Entrances* (1946). The main followers of Thomas are Vernon Watkins, Laurie Lee, and John Heath Stubbs.

The death of Dylan Thomas in 1953 robbed modern poetry of a budding and promising poet.

#### Poetry of the Second World War.

"The second world war (1939—45) like the first, inevitably stimulated the production of a great mass of poetry, most of which was of merely ephemeral interest. The poetry of the Second World War tended to express the writer's personal sense of separation from what was familiar and dear, an alert and rather objective recording of the strange sights and events, he was forced to witness, and a rather stoical acceptance of whatever fate had in store for him."\* "Among the themes which most frequently recur in the work of the war poets are the boredom and frustrations of service life, the waste that is war; appreciation of the friendship found in the services, a deep enjoyment of nature and

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\* Moody-Lovett : A History of English Literature.

of the landscapes of home, and, above all the courage facing up to the hardships of the struggle and the possibilities of ultimate death. The predominant tone is probably one of sadness, and there is less of the spirit of knight-errantry than is to be found in the poetry of 1914—16.”\*\*

The prominent war poets were Alun Lewis (1915—44) Sidney Keyes (1922—43), Keith Douglas (1920—44), Roy Fuller (1912— ), Lawrence Durrell (1912— ) and Alan Rook (1910—) Their works are significant and deserve appreciation. Alun Lewis was the author of *Raider's Dawn* (1942), *Ha! Ha! Among The Trumpets* (1945). Sidney Key brought out *The Iron Laurel* (1942) and *Collected Poems* (1945), Keith Douglas became famous by his *Alamein to Zem-Zem* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1951) Roy Fuller gained popularity by *The Middle of a War* (1942), *Lost Season* (1944), *Epitaphs and Occasions* (1949).

#### Women Poets.

The period witnessed notable work from women poets. Among the prominent women poets of 1940-66 were Charlotte Mew, Mary Webb, Sylvia Lynd, Rose Macaulay, Frances Cornford, H.D. and Dorothy Welleseley. “Women have, obviously, their own contribution to make to Poetry. In war-time they alone know the separation as felt by wife and mother, however “Modern” and however intellectual any may be, there is in all a different sensitivity from that of men in their religious and domestic emotions in general their poetic expression seems to incline more to clarity, to achieve a subtler and more refined intensity, and to preserve a personal integrity apart from the dominating poetic school of the day.”

#### Conclusion.

“There is no lack of activity, in the poetry world of the fifties. For almost years after the war it seemed as if British poetry like Britain herself, was in danger of dying on its feet. Now that has changed, and talent which had been pushing up its buds in the little magazines has now begun to flower. The flowers are not very big yet, and some of them are hybrids

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\*\* Dr. A. S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century.

but at least the garden is growing again. There is more of promise in the England of Today than there has been since the short lived joy of 1945. Let us hope that the next ten years may prove that this country is still capable of such renewal."

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